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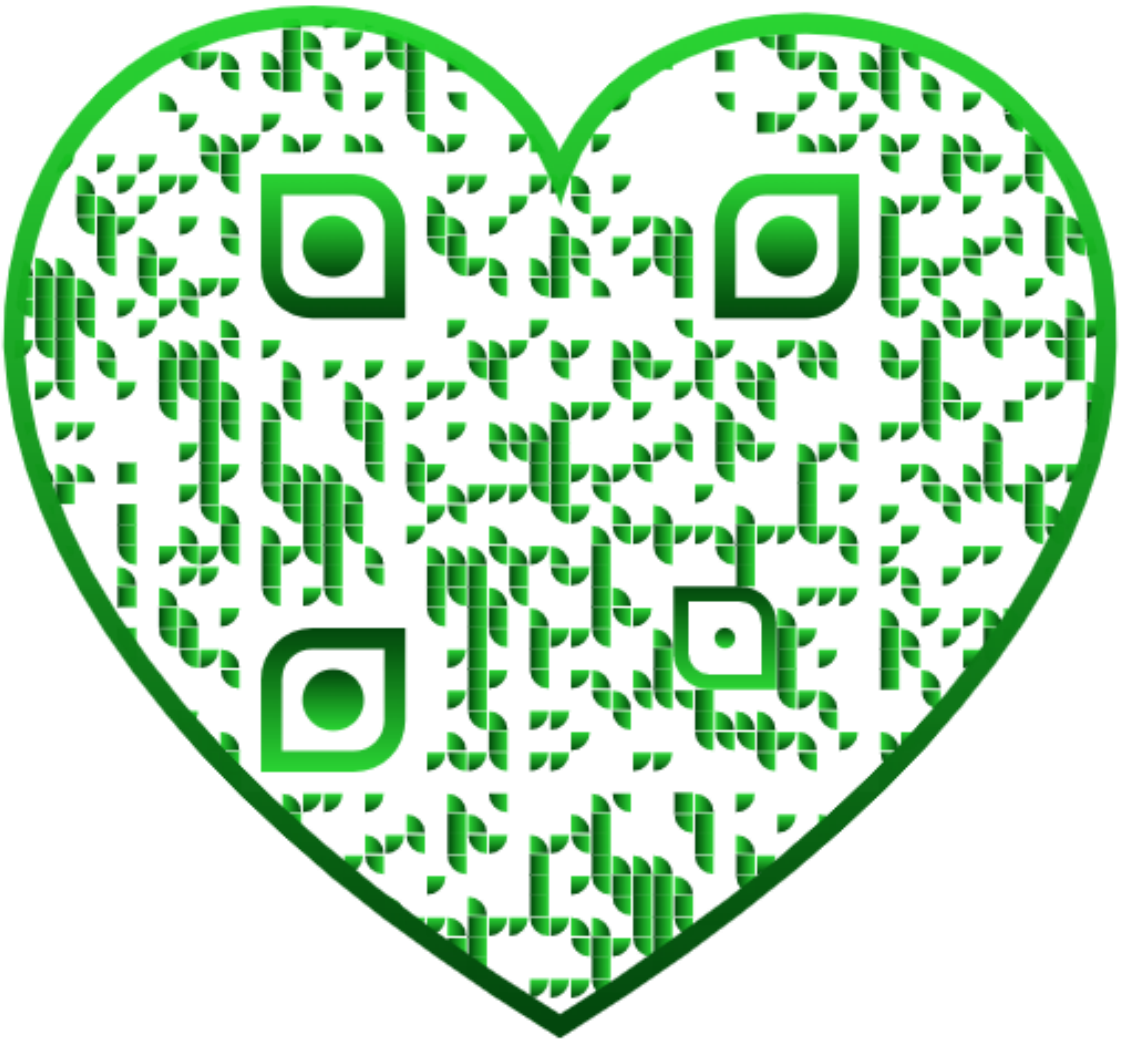

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Distributed by **Marketforce (UK) Ltd**
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Calling all readers!

It's been almost a year since we redesigned, revamped and rebooted *Guitar & Bass* magazine and I'm pleased to say that the feedback we've received has been almost universally positive. We're gluttons for punishment though, so rather than sit back, raise a glass or three and enjoy the plaudits, we've decided once again to canvass opinion.

Simply type bit.ly/gbspringsurvey into your web browser and complete our Spring Survey to let us know what you love, like and dislike about the content of the magazine and you'll be entered into a competition to win a rather fabulous Blackstar Artist 15 valve amplifier worth £649. It's a great prize and we look forward to your feedback.

On the subject of prizes, this month we bring you two more competitions in the shape of opportunities to win a Bulldog guitar stand worth £269 (turn to p7) and one of three Music Nomad Premier Guitar Care Systems worth £37.99, the details of which can be found in the 32-page guitar DIY Handbook that comes free with this issue.

The aforementioned supplement sees our senior product specialist Huw Price explain how to carry out a series of simple maintenance tasks that will help your guitar play and sound better for longer.

We hope you enjoy it – don't forget to write in with any technical questions that might be troubling you, and we'll do our best to answer them in Fretbuzz. See you next time...

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Turn to **page 54** to take advantage of this month's special *Guitar & Bass* subscription offer.

MAY 2016 Vol 27 No 08

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MEET THE EXPERTS...

DAVE HUNTER

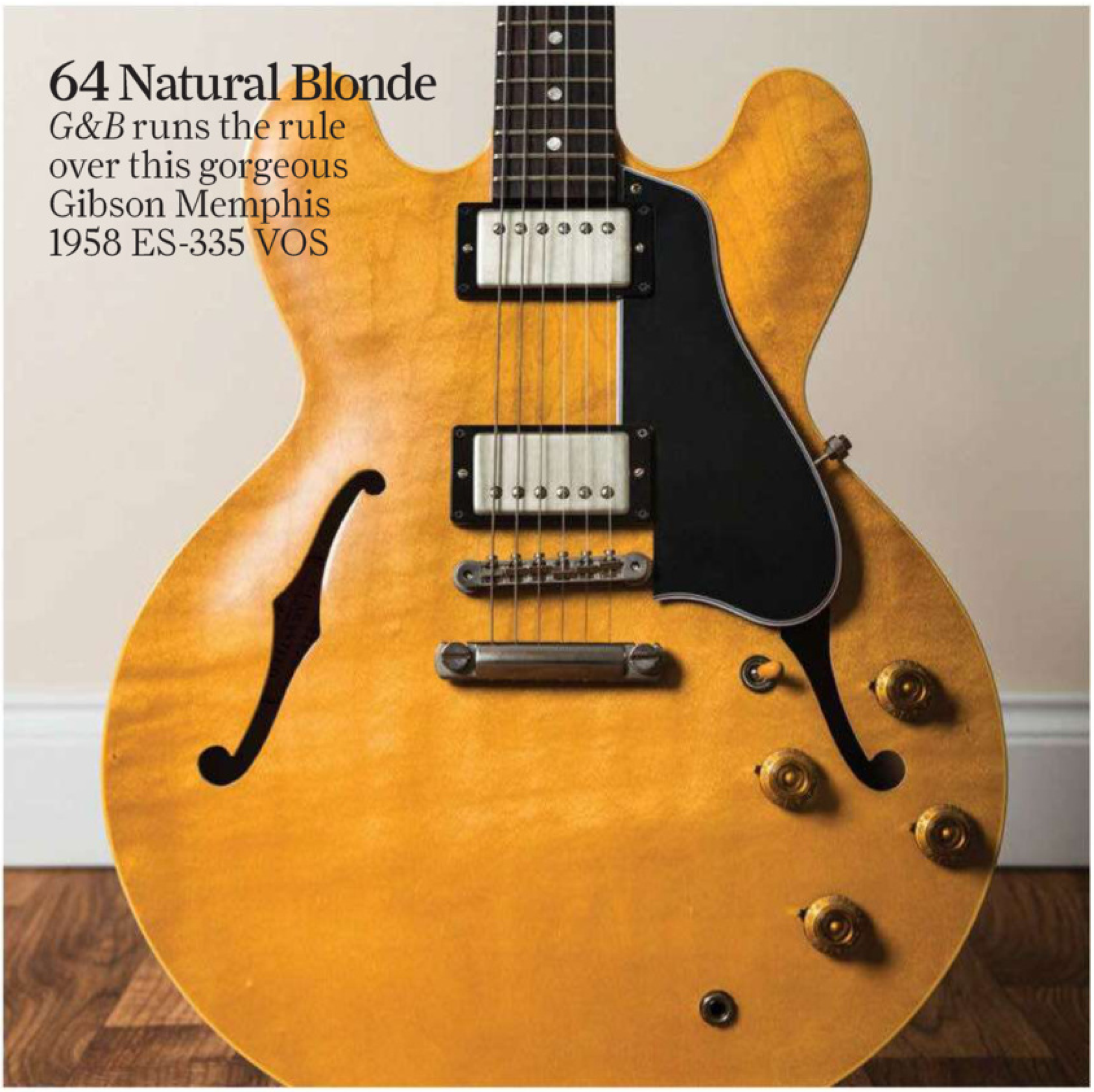
Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*. Check out his column on page 10.

HUW PRICE

Huw spent 16 years as a pro audio engineer working with the likes of David Bowie, Primal Scream and NIck Cave. His book *Recording Guitar & Bass* was published in 2002, sparking a career in guitar journalism. He also builds and maintains guitars, amps and FX.

RICHARD PURVIS

A reformed drummer, Richard has been gigging for over 20 years as a guitarist and bassist, and working as a music journalist for almost as long. He also composes music for television, and is legally married to his 1966 Gibson Melody Maker.



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Opening bars...

Emerging talent on *G&B*'s radar
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ONES TO WATCH

Brum's the word for blues-rockers

BROKEN WITT REBELS

Broken Witt Rebels are on a mission to put Birmingham back on the musical map. The young four-piece, who formed in 2013, have been making a big impression in the second city with their infectious blend of rock and soulful blues, and their five-track EP, *Georgia Pine*, drops in April.

Guitarist James Tranter says: "Bands like Alabama Shakes are huge influences for us. I love that laid-back lazy blues feel they create, and I think we've put that into our own music, but we're also trying to revive the sound of the classic Birmingham bands.

"We're big on Black Sabbath, we love their riffs, and also the Britpop era – bands like Ocean Colour Scene. We're big believers in the Birmingham music scene, it's changed a lot and we want to bring it back to life.

"We've been together for about three years. I met with Dan and Luke and our old drummer and straight away it kicked off. We were all on the same page and knew what we wanted. It was a lot of fun at the time, but as the years have gone on we've taken it more seriously, and we're taking it up a level each week and really pushing ourselves. We're all so committed and on the same page – you don't always get that with a band."

An evolutionary path has carried Broken Witt Rebels from indie-rock beginnings to a more mature, bluesy sound, with lead vocalist Danny Core drawing comparisons to Joe Cocker and Steve Marriott.

"Over the years our music has developed a lot," says Tranter. "We started as an indie group and I joined and introduced a bluesy element, and Dan has found his voice over the years and gets stronger by the day. Our music is driven by strong bluesy guitar riffs and we're also very soulful. Dan's getting better and better, with a bit of Joe Cocker and even Vintage Trouble in there."

The *Georgia Pine* EP was recorded at Monochrome studios in Warwickshire with producer Tom Gittins, who has previously worked with another Birmingham music legend, Robert Plant.

"It's quite a change from our previous EP, *Howlin'*," says Tranter. "We wanted to explore other areas and make sure it was versatile with different types of song to suit different audiences. We spent months at rehearsals until we knew we had the right songs. We recorded for about a week until we had fives songs that we're in love with.

"Tom has worked with Robert Plant, which was a big selling point for us, and the studio is in the middle of nowhere – there's no phone signal, no internet, so you can really focus on the music. Tom's not the sort of person to just throw you into the live room and press record. We'd sit down with him and work together for the benefit of the songs before we started tracking."

The recording sessions saw Tranter stick to a tried and tested formula for his guitar sound. "I used an Epiphone Casino and a Vox AC30, for a nice vintage British tone," he explains. "After that, I used a Fender Blues Junior, and pedal-wise I'm big on the Ibanez Tube Screamer, I used a POG, a vintage Fuzz Face – I like my vintage gear – and a Vox wah. I like a stripped-back set-up and am not someone to hide behind lots of delays and reverbs."

Broken Witt Rebels head out on a three-night headline tour in April before providing the support for American country artist Brantley Gilbert on a run of dates that includes an appearance at Shepherd's Bush Empire. Tranter insists the band won't change their approach to suit the larger venues they'll be playing.

"Live is huge for us," he says. "We always win people over and have a charm about us, and solid live tunes to back it up. It's not just a gig for us, it's a show and we like to get the audience involved and show them they're witnessing something special. For any gig, whoever we're playing in front of, whether it's one person, 10 people or 500 people, we put on the same show and give it 100 per cent. By the end, we'll be sweating like mad and going crazy – it makes no difference to us how many people are watching." **GW**

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Alabama Shakes, Vintage Trouble*

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Q **In how many varieties of wood is the Bulldog Dragon One stand available?**

A Two **B** Five **C** Seven

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Our first edition is a play on the custom car colours used by Fender in the 50s and 60s but, since Gordon Smith are a very British brand of guitar, we felt it appropriate to look to Britain for our custom colours. In this series you will find six classic Morris Minor finishes, the lacquer supplied by official Morris sources: Clipper Blue, Racing Green, Burgundy, Highway Yellow, Sage Green and Trafalgar Blue. We've also added a custom pickguard (designed by Forsyth's very own James) in a cream plastic that perfectly matches the finish, and the elegant Gotoh bridge and chromed control knobs both help to continue the car theme. The pickup has a great Manchester pedigree, made in Chorlton by Jaime at The Creamery and designed by Jaime and New Order / Joy Division guitarist Bernard Sumner.

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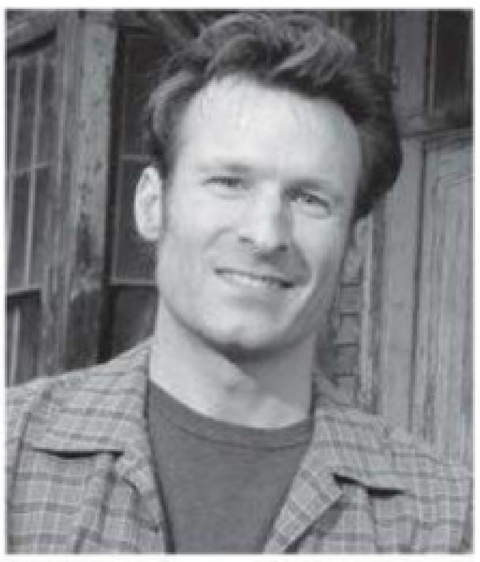
Letters from America

Saul Koll produces around 100 highly sought-after guitars a year in his Portland, Oregon workshop. **DAVE HUNTER** checks out the versatile Duo Glide



DAVE HUNTER
Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of numerous books including *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*.

I first encountered Saul Koll's guitars several years ago on a personal quest of sorts: a bit tired of the same-old same-old, I was searching for a guitar that would both look and sound different from the norm. I found it in the form of a Koll Duo Glide. So, having acknowledged that bias, I will proceed without trying to conceal the fact that I'm a fan of this maker's work. I enjoy his sense of style, I enjoy the tones that so many of his guitars achieve and I enjoy the fact that virtually every Koll you pick up will be different... but different with a purpose. All that and he's a downright nice guy, too.

Prior to his licensing agreement with Premier Builders Guild – which was recently dissolved – Koll's guitars were rarely sighted in the UK. Nor frequently the US, for that matter. They were made one at a time by the man himself in his workshop in Portland, Oregon, by custom order, but largely to a series of standard model templates – some of which he had been producing for over 25 years.

Now, after five years of the PBG relationship that made licensed Koll models far more accessible worldwide, Saul has decided it's in his best interests to bring manufacturing back to Portland, and to take on additional staff to help build and market instruments to dealers and players. To that end, Koll guitars will once again be truly the creations of Saul Koll – with a little help from his friends. The team hopes to produce around 100 guitars in this coming year, plus a number of custom-order instruments.

Koll employs a second three-way toggle to control the middle pickup

I enjoy the fact that virtually every Koll you pick up will be different... but different with a purpose

Following the former on-spec ethos, this Duo Glide was made for the 2016 NAMM Show in Anaheim, California. The Duo Glide is Koll's cornerstone model, but can be a whimsical muse, bending to many guises. It will ably stand in for a Les Paul with figured maple top and humbuckers; go all Gretschified with TV Jones Classics, humpback or thumbnail markers and a Bigsby; or, as in this case, take on a 60s catalogue ethos with three DeArmond-style repro gold foil pickups and a stunning Silvertone Red finish.

The specs on this one take it way above and beyond anything Kay, Harmony or Silvertone ever delivered, of course. The body is made from chambered mahogany, capped with a flat maple top that exhibits interesting figuring, with some subtle birdseye apparent. It's a Gretsch/Gibson-scale guitar at 24.625 inches, with a glued-in mahogany neck carved in an extremely comfortable medium-C profile, and a bound rosewood fingerboard with compound 10–14-inch radius and pearloid thumbnail inlays. I love Koll's 'quiff' headstock, which looks classic, custom and original all at once, without being clunky or ungainly. The addition of a Macassar ebony face veneer with pearloid Koll logo inlay makes this model particularly stylish. Other tasty touches include the in-house clear plastic knobs and the tortoise half-heart pickguard. The Bigsby B-5 vibrato is partnered by a standard tune-o-matic bridge, and up the other end the nut is hand-cut from unbleached bone. The vision carries through to an unbound, segmented f-hole, a change from Koll's traditional classic bound f-hole. Add together all these elements and the result is a visually lively yet uncluttered whole – a guitar that's just aesthetically right.

What might pop the most for many players, though, is the trio of gold foil pickups, custom recreations of

KEY FEATURES

Koll Duo Glide

- **PRICE** Approximately £3,359 as reviewed, excluding shipping and duties
- **BODY** Chambered mahogany with birdseye maple top
- **NECK** Glued-in mahogany neck, medium-C profile
- **FINGERBOARD** Rosewood, 10-14" compound radius, unbleached bone nut 1.687"
- **FRETS** 22 medium-jumbo Jescar nickel silver
- **PICKUPS** 3x Curtis Novak Gold Foils
- **ELECTRONICS** Volume and tone controls, three-way selector (on upper-bass bout), middle-pickup on/off toggle
- **FINISH** Thin nitrocellulose lacquer in Silvertone Red
- **HARDWARE** Schaller tune-o-matic bridge, Bigsby B5 vibrato tailpiece, Schaller G-Series Keystone tuners
- **STRINGS** D'Addario .010–.046"
- **CASE** Koll Deluxe G&G custom rectangular hardshell case
- **CONTACT** Koll Guitars
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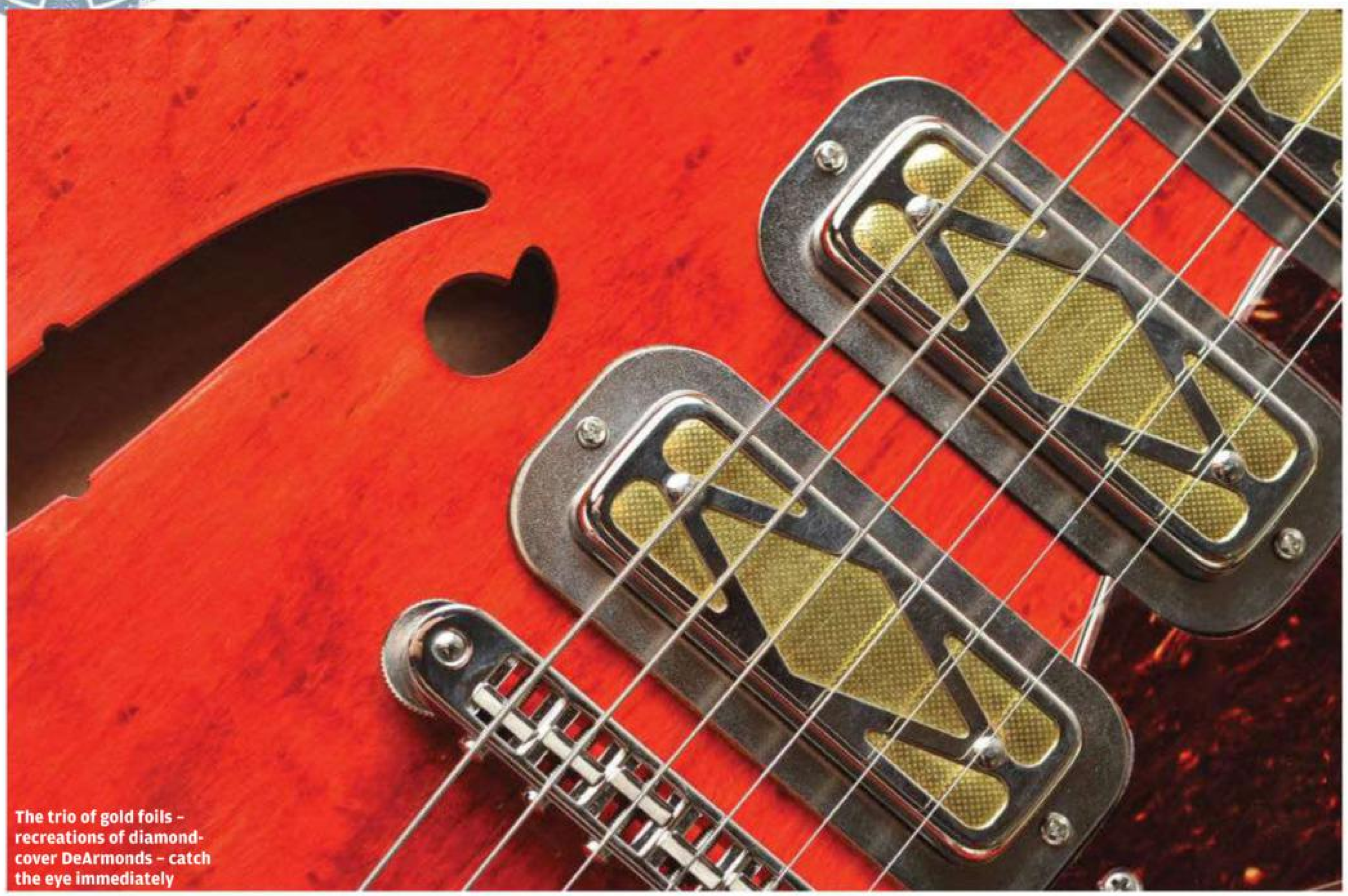


The trio of gold foils – recreations of diamond-cover DeArmonds – catch the eye immediately

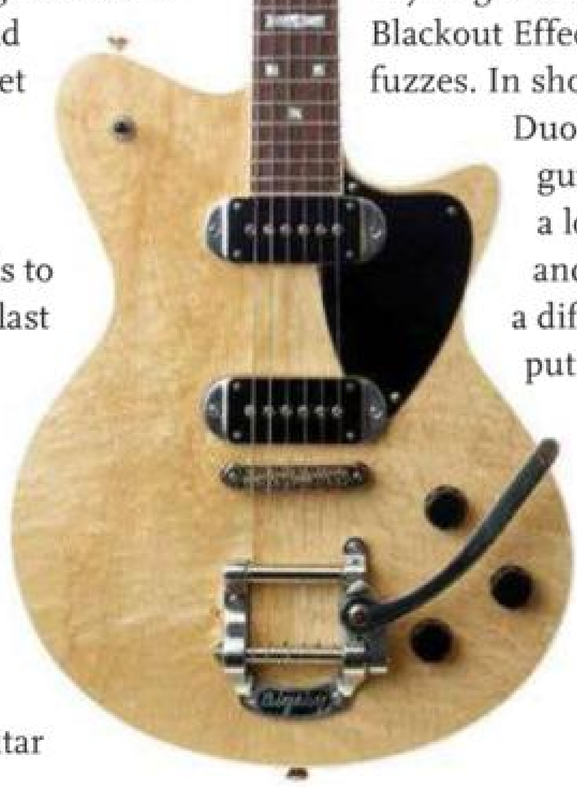
diamond-cover DeArmonds made by Curtis Novak. I've often taken issue with having three pickups on guitars with anything other than five-way Strat switching, finding the Gibson-style three-way switch and four-knob setup utterly inadequate. Koll eases past any redundancies by employing just a master volume and tone control, with a three-way selector in the Les Paul position and a second on/off toggle down toward the tail end to bring the middle pickup into play in any position. Simple.

The Duo Glide's's offset body shape, with its enlarged upper-bass-bout horn, balances surprisingly well both in the lap and on the strap, so it's a comfortable guitar to play in any position. Saul's's known for sending out guitars that are set up beautifully; this one is no exception, and it has an easy, confident playability that you'll be quick to warm to. Time for my next confession: this isn't the first Koll with gold foils that I've played. I put a pair of original mid-60s DeArmonds on my own Duo Glide a few years ago just for kicks, and this Silvertone Red rendition takes me right back to all the fun I had with that one.

Hit the strings hard and the gold foils' response is simultaneously edgy and compressed, biting and soft

Novak's gold foils are impressively true to vintage, and they remind me that so much of what I love about these pickups – so much of what many players love – is their oddly contradictory nature. Hit the strings hard and the gold foils' response isis simultaneously edgy and compressed, biting and soft. The dichotomy lendsls great touch sensitivity to the playing experience, and boatloads of texture, too. Highsis are silky, just a bit granularar and never spikey; the midrange is juicy and appealing without being obnoxious; and the lows, while on the soft side, are round and bouncy. The results are the same whether I play the Duo Glide through a custom JTM45-based head and cab, a Kometet 60 and cab, or a tweed 5E3-like 1x12 combo creation. Which is to say an absolute blast through a wide range of tones and differentnt playing styles.

Another hip thing about putting a set of gold foils in a guitar of this calibre is that, as fun and funky as they can be in any of the vintage catalogue makes named previously, you really haven't heard them shine until you've experienced them via a more formidable instrument. Thus equipped, the Duo Glide is happy to Gretsch out for rockabilly or thick country twang, it's right at home through a wide spectrum of rock and/or roll – from classic to garage to alt – and it absolutely loves the chewy hair induced by both my Roger Mayer Spitfire and Blackout Effectors Musket fuzzes. In short, this Koll Duo Glide is a guitar with a lot of character, and it's a difficult one to put down.



Another Koll Duo Glide, this time with P-90 pickups

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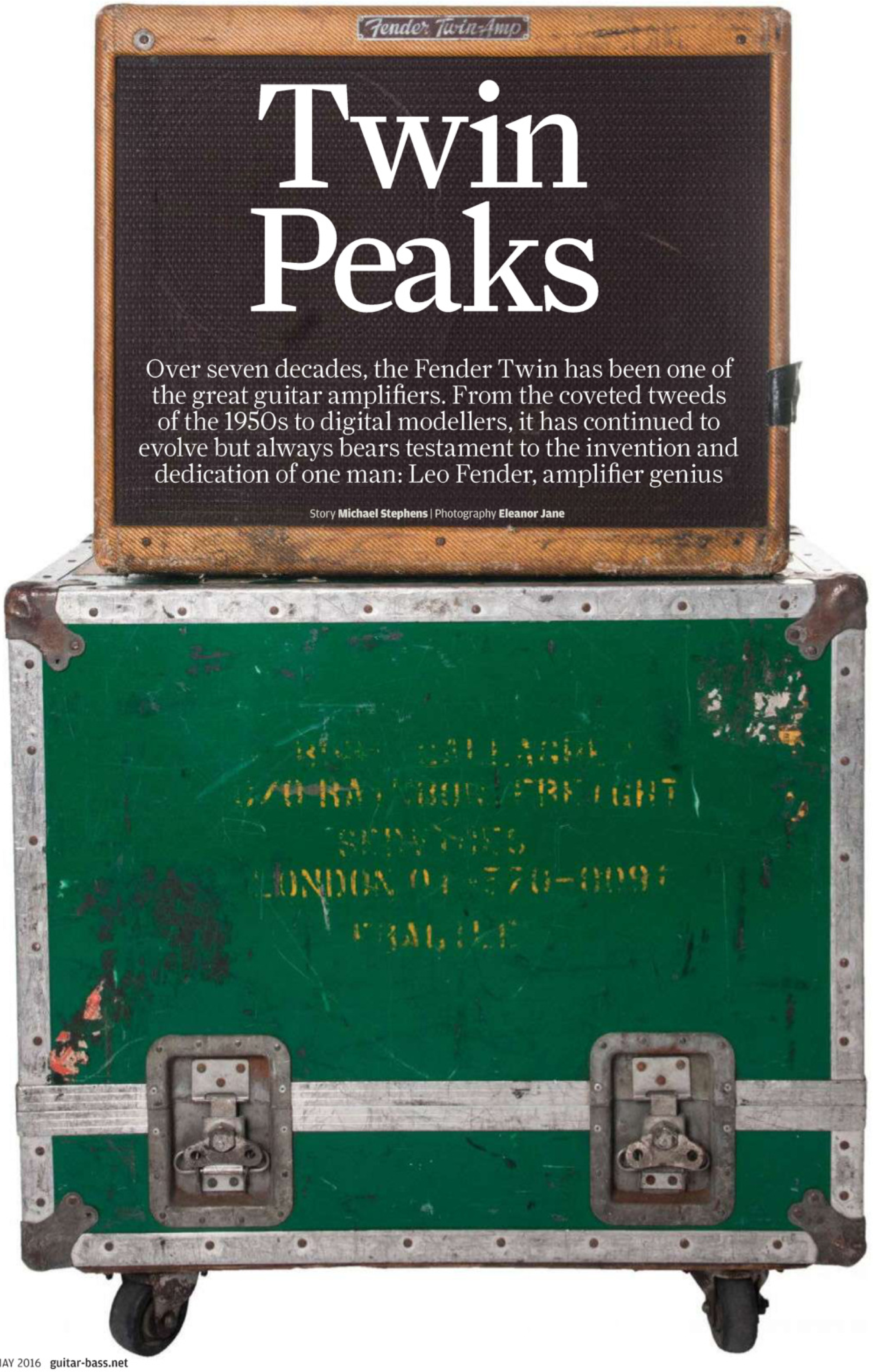
Twin Peaks

Over seven decades, the Fender Twin has been one of the great guitar amplifiers. From the coveted tweeds of the 1950s to digital modellers, it has continued to evolve but always bears testament to the invention and dedication of one man: Leo Fender, amplifier genius

Story **Michael Stephens** | Photography **Eleanor Jane**



Clarence Leonidas "Leo" Fender infamously never learned to play the guitar. How can that be?! It didn't, though, stop his company producing numerous classics of guitar design – including the Broadcaster/Telecaster, the Stratocaster, the Precision and Jazz basses, the Jaguar, the Jazzmaster... the list goes on.

Leo had plenty of influential guitarists around him to perfect designs for players' preferences, but at heart he wasn't a guitarist. He was an engineer. Leo played the saxophone, by all accounts decently, but he was no John Coltrane.

Mr Fender originally worked as an accountant, but lost his job in the Great Depression. However, he had learned enough to spot a gap in the market for mass-instrument production: more 'basic' than the traditional luthiers at Gibson, Gretsch and others but still quality instruments that could be made at an affordable price as guitars were becoming electrified.

But electronic engineering was Leo's true passion. Fender's fascination with electronics started when he was just 14 years old; his uncle had built a radio from spare parts and the loud music coming from the speaker mightily impressed Leo. Soon, repairing radios became a serious hobby for the young man.

Leo eventually opened the Fender Radio And Record Shop in Fullerton, California, where he combined his loves of music and tinkering with electronics. Part of the service he offered at his shop was amplifier repair, and amplifiers were then still a relatively 'young' concept.

He was soon designing and building his own amplifiers and was also hired to design a PA system that would be specialised for use at dances, where there was a need to eliminate the feedback that often seeped from existing primitive systems used in school gyms and small concert halls. It was time, step-by-step, to usher in amplified rock 'n' roll guitar for the big stage...

Congratulations, it's Twins!

After his series of single-speaker amps, notably the Champ and Deluxe, Leo Fender's Twins were 'born' in 1952. Three years after the Broadcaster/Telecaster guitar and two years before the Stratocaster, despite their now legendary volume, early tweed Twins were rated at just 25-watts output. Still loud for their day, but nowhere near what Twins would grow up to be.

'Twinspotters' have many variations to discuss and dissect. Early Twins were covered in tweed 'airline linen' cloth that was similar to what was commonly found on luggage of that era, while later blonde Twins used the vinyl covering called Tolex. Electronically, the earlier Fender Twins were simple enough – two 12-inch Jensen Alnico V Concert Series speakers and a dual 6L6 power tube configuration that put out only 25 watts, an output level that would be more than enough for most players today.

Variations in cabinet design followed: 'wide-panel' versions and then 'narrow panels', with no extra wood on the front of the amp, except for the narrow top and bottom panels that hold the baffle board to the cabinet.

Guitar & Bass columnist and author of *The Guitar Amp Handbook* Dave Hunter tells us: "The earlier wide-panel and low-powered narrow-panel tweed Twins were really just siblings of the Super and Pro amps with the exact same circuit, but with the 2x12 speaker complement.

"Until the high-powered tweed Twin came along in 1958, that rendition of the Twin was still Fender's most powerful amp intended purely for guitar, although many players who wanted a bigger, tighter performance still used a Bassman, which had a larger output transformer and more power."

And the Twin was getting famous, too. There is the famous photo of Bill Carson, with whose input Leo originally designed the Stratocaster, beaming at the camera cradling his new guitar with one boot perched cockily atop a Fender Twin. The caption reads, 'Billy Carson uses Fender Fine Electric Instruments Exclusively'. It's a classic image in Fender history.

By 1957, the Twin was using a 5E8A circuit, and the power amp was beefed up to 40 then 80 watts

Indeed, maybe it was only the 'birth' of rock 'n' roll and the timely launch of the Fender Stratocaster that got Leo serious in his search for bigger guitar tone. By 1957/58, the Twin amp was using a 5E8A circuit, and the power amp section had been beefed up to 40, then 80, watts. It also used a relatively rare dual-rectifier design and two 5U4 rectifier valves. This arrangement resulted in lower power amp 'sag' or compression on hard notes than heard on previous tweed Twins.

The earliest tweed Twins are, of course, highly collectible – we recently saw a '54 on Ebay for $9,000 – and are out of the reach of all but those with the deepest pockets.

Shedding the tweeds

In 1963, the Fender Twin had reverb and 'vibrato' functions added. The 'vibrato' control was, of course, a misnomer – instead of producing pitch fluctuation like a true vibrato, it is a tremolo. And, of course, what many people think of as the most renowned Twin is not a tweed or later blonde.

In 1963, the Twin Reverb was launched officially after Fender began the transition to blackface models. These earliest blackface >

storemags

bands un-mic'd on big stages, but if you liked a distorted tone – which by the mid-60s many did – your bandmates would not have thanked you for the deafening volume.

But some players like Twins for exactly this reason: you get big Fender tone, which you can then colour with effects from song to song (or within songs).

However, be prepared to buy some pedals – not that an unadorned Twin can't sound great...

Guitar legend James Burton says: "If you can plug your guitar into an amp and make it sound good, that's what it's all about.

The amp I really enjoy playing, especially when I'm travelling, is the Fender '65 Twin Reverb. It's got everything you need for live playing and it has great tone.

"That amp just works for me and it's real trustworthy. When I travel on the road, I do use a little digital delay and maybe a little chorus, but I just like the sound of the guitar and playing something that I think people will appreciate and understand."

But if you do take more pedals on the road with you, don't expect one of your bandmates to carry your amp. With enormous power and output transformers, Twin Reverbs weigh a huge 35kg or more, and you'll still find players whose backs just can't cope. Maybe they should come with a free roadie?

While other Fenders start to break up at around 4 on the volume knob, a Twin stayed clean to around 6 or 7

Twins kicked out a super-sturdy 85 watts. Hunter reflects: "From the perspective of today's player, the tweed Twins – low- and high-powered – come off sounding more like an early Marshall Bluesbreaker, and are extremely close in circuit, too, rather than what we most commonly think of as a Fender Twin.

"Which is, of course, the Twin Reverb, the archetype of which arrived with the blackface amps later in 1963. That really is the benchmark design, the most powerful large professional guitar amp then available from a major manufacturer, it set the standard for 'big clean tone'.

"That said, a Twin Reverb can roar with authority when cranked up, too, as Michael Bloomfield proved on many of his classic recordings of the mid-60s."

The headroom of a Twin Reverb was part of the idea. While other Fenders started to break up at around 4 on the volume knob, a Twin Reverb stayed clean to around 6 or 7. This clean headroom was great for playing in big

From black to silver

Amid the blackface run of 1963-1967, Leo Fender sold his company to CBS in 1965. For guitars, the sale is now seen widely to have negatively affected quality, but it seemed less the case for Fender amps. That said, perhaps wary of potential buyer prejudice, Fender's Twin Reverbs of 2015 include a politic blackface 1965 reissue.

Of course, new owners always change things, and in 1968 the silverface era began.

The grille cloth became blue sparkle and the labels were blue/turquoise, too. And early ones had different circuitry – changes to the bias and phase inverter circuits. But the engineers at Fender also added seven additional components to the output stage, effectively turning it into a semi-cathode-biased output.

So, while silverfaces were notionally boosted to 100 watts, most amp gurus opine that they are not as natural-sounding as blackface-era Twins. Further changes were made – a boost to 135 watts (pardon?), but with the balance of a master volume.

The issue of 'colouring' the core Twin sound remained a problem for some players. Johnny Marr used silverface Twins extensively throughout his time in The Smiths and recalls: "The Fender Twin has got loads of power, and that handles the bottom to midrange. The Fender has also got the best reverb, so I just let the Roland (JC-120, with which Marr blended the Twin) handle the top end most of the time; it's a dream and sounds great. It's something that I wanted to get together for a long time. On the first long British tour, I used either one or the other depending on what sounded good in the soundcheck. When I listen to some of the live tapes now I think they could have been so much better if I'd just used a Fender Twin. If I had the choice between one or the other, I'd think I'd use the Fender Twin with a really good Roland chorus pedal." Oh, and Marr now favours a lighter-in-weight 1x12 Deluxe.

Variations kept coming throughout the 1970s – the Super Twin pushing output to 180 watts but being relatively shortlived. In the 1980s came the Twin Reverb II, the red knob Twin (not to be confused with the so-called 'evil Twin' of the 90s).

But whether tweed, blackface or silverface, they all boast their own nuanced character. As Hunter notes: "While the Twin was definitely a 'benchmark' design, it was also very different things in different eras, so much so that you might consider it an entirely different amplifier."

Harry Hank, of Hank's Vintage Guitars near Pittsburgh, argues: "The late-50s tweeds were perhaps a bit darker than the blackface amps, but the addition of reverb really set

FAMILY OF TWINS

While usually playing his fabled Gibson Les Paul, Michael Bloomfield mainly deployed a blackface Twin Reverb for his revered recordings with The Paul Butterfield Blues Band. In his later years, when playing a Gibson ES-355 or Fender Stratocaster, he often plugged into a 50s tweed Twin.

Live 1960s photos of the Rolling Stones also show Keith Richards playing blackface Twin Reverbs, but he's a 50s tweed man at heart. Roadie/tech Johnny Starbuck has told The Keith Shrine website: "Keith plays primarily through Fender Twin amplifiers. Sometimes, Pierre de Beauport (Richards' personal tech) does a little mix and match with other kinds of amps, but it doesn't usually last very long.

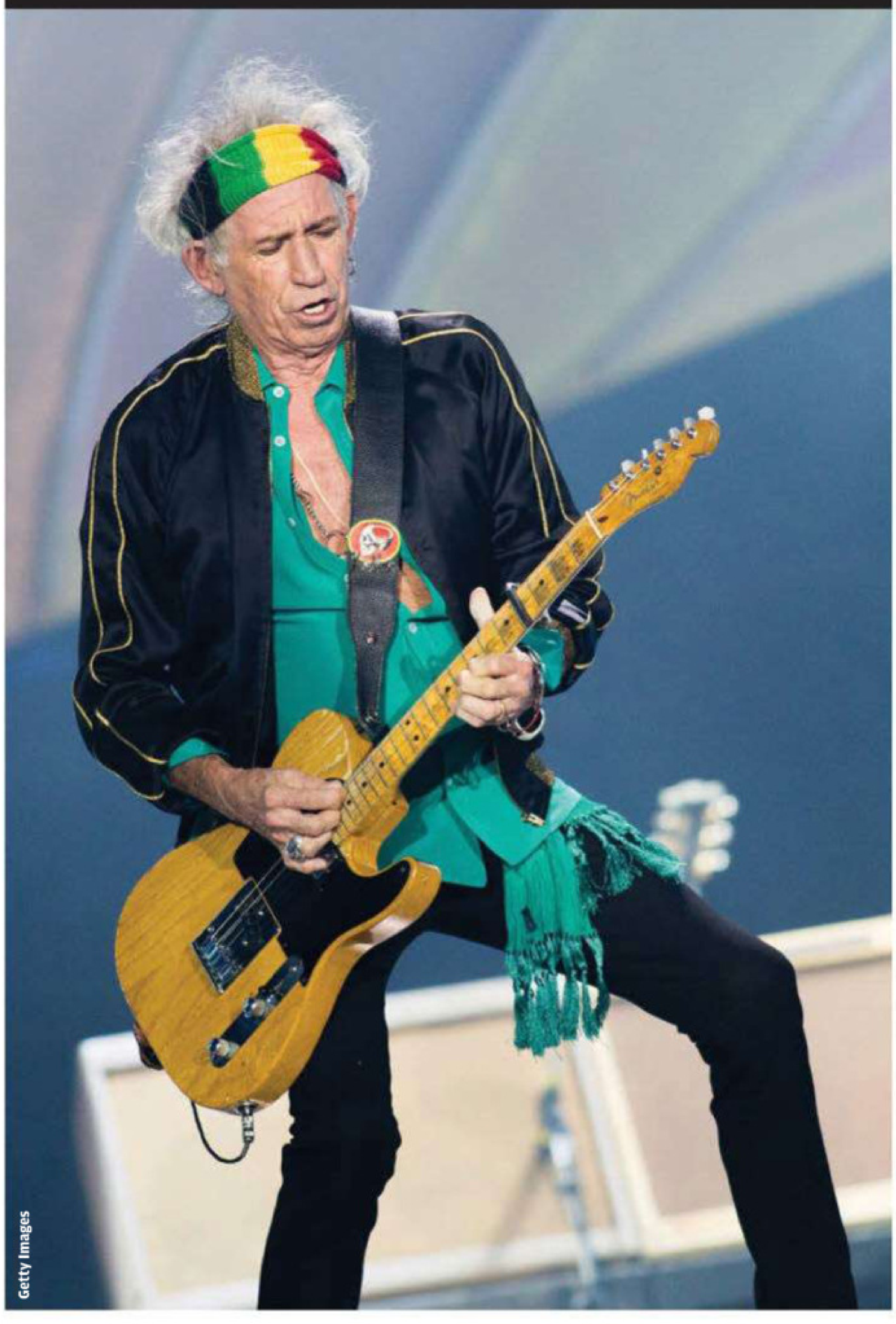
"One of the Twins that Keith uses has the serial number #00003. It's the earliest known Fender Twin, since we've looked for numbers one and two and been unable to find them anywhere. We figure they got thrown away years ago when they got old and beat up and before the concept of vintage amps drove their value up."

John Lennon and George Harrison used silverface Twins during the recording of *Abbey Road* and *Let It Be*; The Beatles also used Twin Reverbs during the Apple rooftop gig.

The late Danny Gatton had at least two 50s tweed Twins and Eric Clapton remains a fervent fan. His original is a '57 and, of course, there is now his own Fender Twinolux model based on that amp, with EC's own personal tweaks.

At his 70s loudest, Ted Nugent was known to use six Twin Reverbs tied to six tall Fender speaker cabinets. Ouch!

Stevie Ray Vaughan was more often associated with Fender Vibroverbs and Super Reverbs, but in 1985 was using a pair of Fender Twin Reverbs – a mid-60s 85-watt blackface alongside a late-70s 100-watt silverface version with master volume. Double the trouble! Johnny Marr used Twins throughout his Smiths days, while Kurt Cobain and Jack White proudly flew the alt.rock flag for Twin use in the nineties and noughties respectively.



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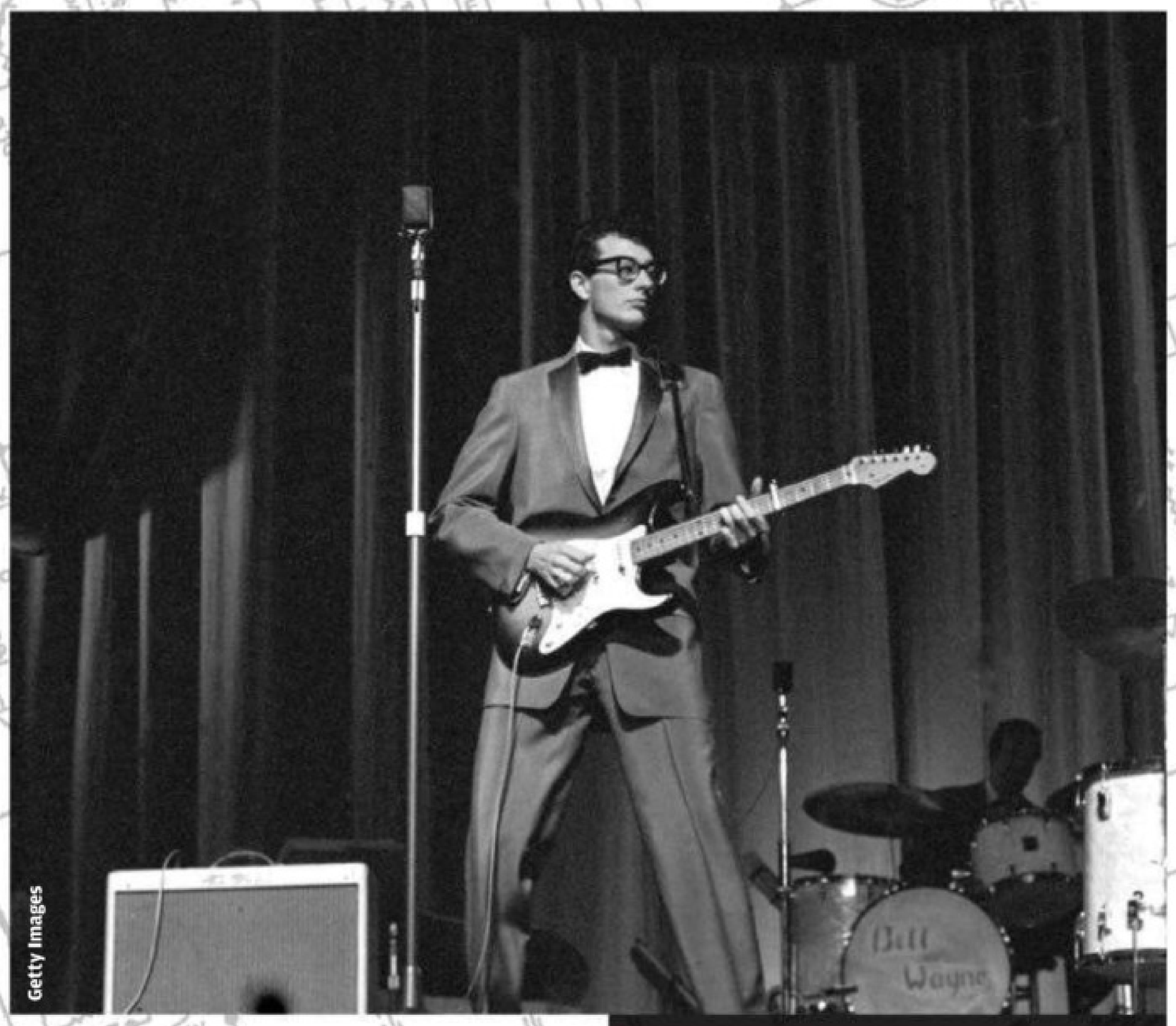

the blackface amps off on a new road. When Fender started adding master volume and tone boost controls to the silverface amps, the sound completely changed from the clean with lots of headroom tone to a much dirtier and less responsive amp."

Leo's legacy and Twin peaks

As we've said already, Leo Fender was at heart an amp engineer. Some argue that's why Fender soon stole a march on the amps of the more traditional luthier companies of Gibson, Gretsch, Rickenbacker et al.

Hank adds: "Fender's radio repair business led him to start making sound equipment for sale and rental, which ultimately grew from the K&L days into the Fender amp company. His ability to make custom sound gear early-on created a demand for his products, as compared to other companies that failed to see this opportunity."

The Twin itself has gone through many changes over more than 60 years, but nearly every player will say it's a fine – if very loud and heavy – classic.

Were Leo Fender's amplifiers ultimately his best achievement, then? To wrap up, *Guitar & Bass* asked the venerable Tom Wheeler, author of the ultimate book on Fender amps, *The Soul Of Tone*, that same question.

"I think Mr Fender's contributions transcend the question," replies Tom. "Remember that in his mind, the electric guitar and its amplifier were inseparable; they were components of a unified entity, a single musical instrument unto itself. A Fender guitar through another company's amp, or another company's guitar through a Fender amp, or a Fender guitar through a Fender amp – all of these combos have produced compelling tones on countless occasions.

"I play through several Fenders – an ancient tweed Champ, a Pro Jr, an old brown Deluxe, or a Super-Sonic 22. I have never owned a Twin because I have never needed one, but the point about the Twin is that it is there when calling on a higher power.

"I think Leo Fender's genius was that once he got rolling, he envisioned an entire line of amplifiers to suit every need and taste. Each of us has our own criteria for greatness (to my ear, all amplifiers are judged against my brown Deluxe), but I think it is fair to consider how many clubs, stages, and studios keep a Twin as a permanent fixture.

"If only for that reason, anyone asserting that the Fender Twin is the greatest amp of all time would get no argument from me."

WHEN ROBBIE MET BUDDY

For so many guitar players, Buddy Holly and his Stratocaster were a huge influence. But when an aspiring 14-year-old Robbie Robertson (of The Band) met Buddy at a Toronto show in 1957 he got a different insight to the pioneering Buddy Holly sound.

"I hung around after the show because I wanted to know how he got that sound. So I waited until everyone was loading out, and I went around back and asked him, 'Mr Holly, how do you get that sound: Is it the guitar? Is it the amplifier?'

"And he said, 'So, you're a guitar player? OK, I'll tell you'. And I thought, 'here I am, Buddy Holly is about to give me the secret'. And he said, 'you see that Fender Twin? It's got two speakers in it. One of them quit – and I never fixed it'."

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READER BOARDS

LUKE SMYTH plays guitar in psychedelic glam-rock act Ulysses. Here, he talks us through his quest for pedalboard perfection

KIT LIST

Luke Smyth

- **PEDALS** Boss TU-3 Tuner, Boss BF-2 Flanger, Boss DD-6 Digital Delay, Danelectro DJ-13 French Toast Octave Distortion, Dunlop Cry Baby (90s reissue), Homebrew Electronics Uno Mos Boost, footswitches for Marshall JVM410 and Peavey Classic 50
- **PATCH CABLES** Various!
- **POWER SUPPLY** No idea, covered in gaffer!
- **BOARD TYPE** Pedaltrain Classic Pro
- **HEAR IT HERE** www.ulyssestheband.com

What inspired this setup?

"I had a smaller board-in-a-bag thing, which I've had for years, but the built-in velcro on the board didn't do anything anymore so every time I opened it up there was a big unprofessional explosion of pedals and leads. It took me almost 10 years to get round to getting it sorted out, though! Turned out Jules' (bass player in Ulysses) dad had a Pedaltrain Classic Pro for sale at a steal, so I've just started sorting it out. Currently, it's my live rig but I'm going to add lots of my other pedals so it's all there. I love my pedals, but this board is all about what I need live. I ended up with a Marshall JVM410, as I simply need the decibel jumps you can get with amp channel switching to poke out through our noise, plus it has two master volumes, all foot-switchable. While I'm trying to sing, play and perform, it has to be easy down there. I use wah a lot in an expressive way to enhance the vowel sound, rather than wah pedalling. My favourite fuzz is my Danelectro French Toast, it just cuts through – needs an on/off light on it though! I might have to get it rehoused. I use a delay a bit and occasional reverb off the amp to colour specific parts."

Is there another pedal that you are looking to add?

"I'd love an original Ibanez Tube Screamer pedal. Apparently, Marc Ford used one into a Marshall a lot on The Black Crowes' *The Southern Harmony And Musical Companion* album, which is still one of my all-time fave guitar albums. I am a total wah fiend, so a BMF Effects wah pedal, like Marc uses, is on the list. I'll have to pop in to see my good friend Rod at Vintage And Rare in Bath and blackmail him again for one! Am I a massive Marc Ford fan? You betcha! My other favourite guitarists are Mick Ronson, John McGeoch, Paul McCartney and Stephen Malkmus."

What guitars and amps do you use with this board?

"I use 70s/80s Burny LP-types, Greco LP-types, double cutaways and Vs, a Maya S-type, even a Hondo Prince T-type. I love my Danelectro DC-59 12-string and Epiphone Casino, also. My main amp is a Marshall JVM410 into a Marshall 1960A cab. I also use a Peavey Classic 50 head into a Marshall 1960A cab and love my Fender 'Evil' Twin. I've got a red knob Fender Champ that is incredible, but I don't use it live. I have some other great pedals I'm not using live at the moment but hope to squeeze onto the board – a Vox Tone Bender, Danelectro delay pedal, DOD FX20-B phaser and DOD envelope filter pedal."

What lessons have you learned along the way?

"If you have something dodgy, it will go wrong at the most important gig of your life – be it a pedal, lead, power supply, battery, amp, guitar – be sensibly prepared!"

Guitar & Bass SHOW US YOUR BOARD

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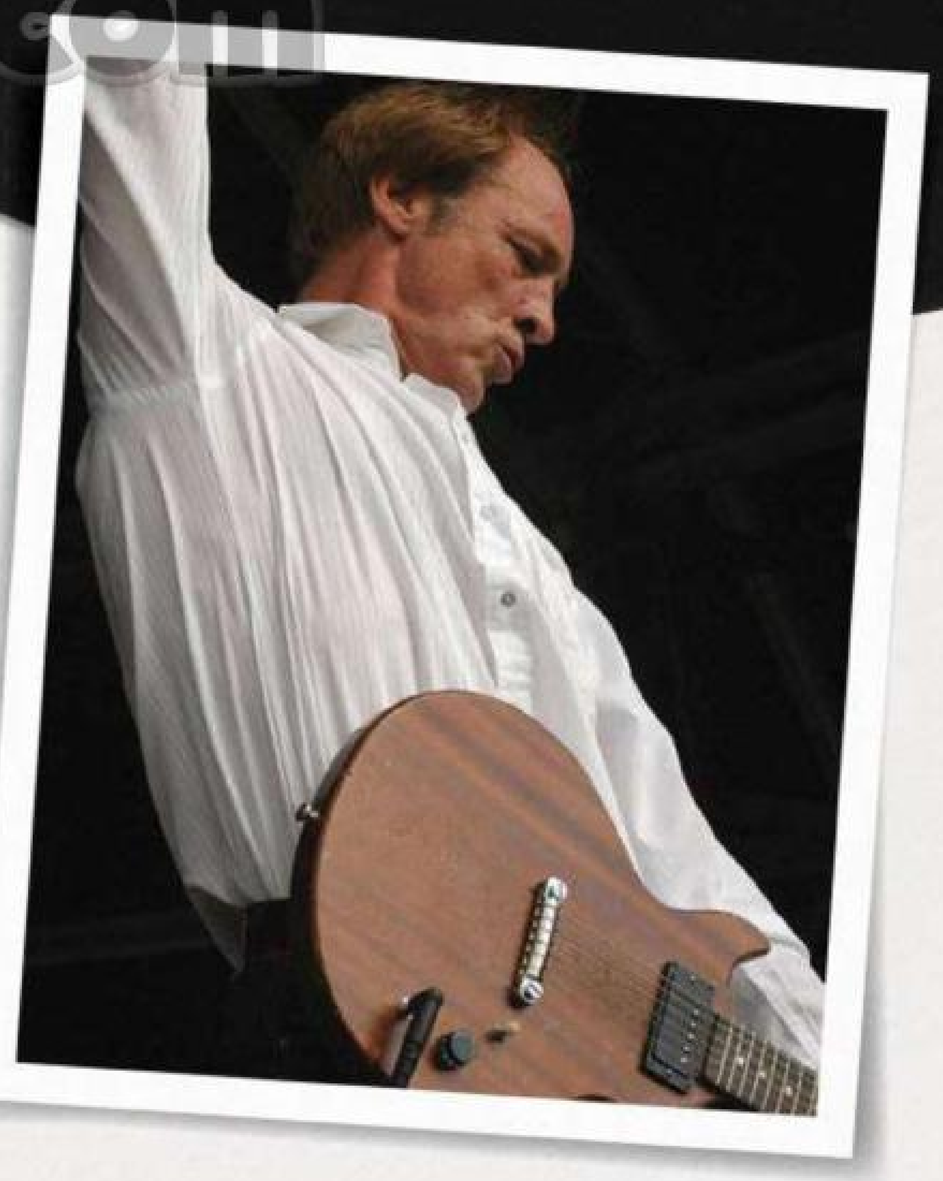
SOUNDTRACK OF MY LIFE

John Otway

The self-proclaimed 'Patron Saint Of Losers' picks the albums that helped make him what he is



While he claims to have flirted with professional suicide by attempting a reinvention as a 'musicianly' artist with a self-depreciating image, John Otway is a fine guitarist. He possesses an intriguing collection of instruments, most conspicuously a custom 'opposed double-neck' Gordon Smith guitar. He has twice reached the UK singles Top 30, albeit a quarter of a century apart, via *Really Free* (with multi-instrumentalist Wild Willy Barrett) and 2002's *Bunsen Burner*. Moreover, while still marketing himself as 'Rock and Roll's Greatest Failure', Otway is later this year set to make a new album in Montserrat, where The Rolling Stones, Paul McCartney, Pink Floyd, Black Sabbath and many others recorded.
For more information on John Otway, go to www.johnotway.com

Bob Dylan
GREATEST HITS

"We didn't have a record player until I was nearly 15. Not long afterwards Margaret, my elder sister, bought this. Listening to it was a road to Damascus moment – mainly because, unlike most other English-language pop music then, there was as much emphasis on lyrics as melody and chord structure. As a result, I bought everything Dylan had released previously."

The Shangri-Las
GOLDEN HITS OF THE SHANGRI-LAS

"There's a lot of unconscious humour through the girls' sincerity, particularly on *I Can Never Go Home Anymore* – a guilt-wracked daughter whose mother has died of loneliness – although *Past, Present And Future* is attractive for being devoid of passion. *Real Tears From Both Eyes*, which might be on my new album, is much in the Shangri-Las tradition."

Janis Joplin
I GOT DEM OL' KOZMIC BLUES AGAIN MAMA!

"When the Monterey Pop film reached England in 1968, I was blown away by her vocal extremity. She appeared to be pushing as much air out of her lungs as possible in order to ensure that nothing that went through her microphone was lower in volume than a screech. Her attitude was the same on this first solo album – and it opened up a world of possibilities for me."

Van Morrison
ASTRAL WEEKS

"Van's delivery contained all sorts of subtleties of enunciation, despite – or because of – him singing any old how with slovenly diction and through his nose over open-ended jamming. He and his accompanists were purportedly extrapolating it on the spot. My mum – who had an operatic soprano – didn't understand why I had it on automatic replay for weeks."

Benny Hill
BENNY HILL SINGS?

"Before he started rehashing old ideas and going for that saucy postcard humour that made him a star in America, he was a fine comic songwriter. *What A World* was the funniest Dylan send-up ever recorded. It was on this collection – which I span endlessly, absorbing every groove, so much so that I revived *The Old Fiddler* on my *Ot-Air* album."

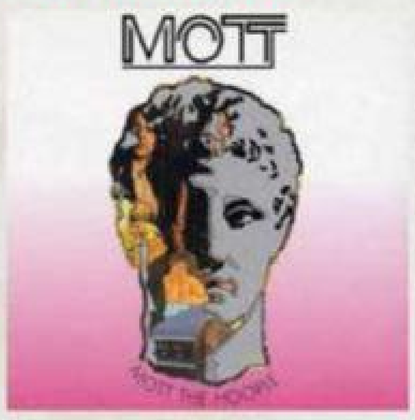
Various Artists
THE ROCK MACHINE TURNS YOU ON.

"Towards the end of the 60s, record companies began investing more in LPs than 45s, sometimes shop-windowing them via samplers – this was the first. After a while, it became a product in its own right. While the likes of Taj Mahal and The Zombies were most dissimilar, the tracks hung together – and I couldn't imagine them in any other order."

Various Artists
NICE ENOUGH TO EAT

"This could be bought at half the cost of a normal album. It focused on Island acts and, while it didn't cover as wide a variety of genres as *Rock Machine*, was still totally absorbing. I saw most of the bands featured – Free, Blodwyn Pig, King Crimson, Quintessence – when they played at Friars, which is to Aylesbury what the Cavern is to Liverpool."

Mott The Hoople
MOTT THE HOOPLE



"Their arrangement of Sir Douglas Quintet's *At The Crossroads* was on *Nice Enough To Eat* – which prompted me to both procure this debut effort and be there when they came to Friars on Monday 1 December 1969, a date remembered because they were the most exciting band I'd ever heard – and they were as ecstatic as the customers at being so well received."

Fairport Convention
LIEGE & LIEF

"Sandy Denny was the stylistic opposite to Janis Joplin, but still I was most taken by her on this fourth album by, arguably, the first true British folk-rock outfit. Some of the material here was also presented at the local club that Wild Willy Barrett established, and where I did floor spots prior to teaming up with him in 1971 – and the rest, as they often say, is history."

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HRS UNLIMITED

The black 1955 'Howard Reed' Stratocaster and '58 Flying V known as 'Amos' in Joe's lounge

at home with Bonamassa *part two*

Last month, Joe talked us through the guitars on his new album, *Blues Of Desperation*. He also showed us a few very special extras from one of the greatest collections on Earth...

Story **Chris Vinnicombe** | Photography **Eleanor Jane**

Driving away from Joe Bonamassa's home in the Hollywood Hills down towards the flickering lights of Los Angeles, we wonder if we've ever seen so many incredible vintage guitars in a single location. Given that what was supposed to be a 90-minute interview slot ended up lasting over four and a half hours, it's clear that Joe enjoys showing people the highlights of his collection. And even though we were supposed to be sticking to the instruments that were used on his new album, the blues star couldn't resist letting us take a look at a few very special guitars with considerable history.

"I bought Terry's guitar last August," Bonamassa says of the heavily road-worn 1952 Telecaster owned previously by Terry Reid, the under-appreciated British rock singer and guitarist who turned down offers to front both Jimmy Page's New Yardbirds and, later, Deep Purple. "He bought it in 1968 when he was on tour with Cream, and the front pickup died. When they played Madison Square Garden with Cream, he brought it to [legendary NYC musical instrument store] Manny's and they put a new Gibson Patent Number humbucker in it.

"I'm a big Terry fan. There's some great footage of the guitar at Glastonbury in 1971 on YouTube. When you see the footage of it, this thing was trashed in '71. Terry had the neck refinished in the eighties, but I had it refretted."

Market trader

We wonder whether Joe can remember when he was first bitten by the serious guitar collector's bug. "I've always been serious about it," he admits. "I was dormant for a while, though, and actually sold a bunch of stuff that I was holding from the 1990s in 2006. I saw a '64 ES-335 priced at $28,000 and dealers willing to pay $22-23,000 for it, and I'm like, sure! A dealer friend of mine paid me $18,500 for a '65 Strat in sunburst! So I sold a bunch of it and was very dormant through the height [of the economic crisis]. When the crash hit, ultimately my fortunes went up and I started to buy again."

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Above left **The white poker chip and black 'guard make this one of the rarest Gibsons in existence**
Top right **Terry Reid's '52 Telecaster was retrofitted with a Gibson Patent Number neck humbucker in New York in 1968**
Above right **The Howard Reed Stratocaster is set to be replicated by Fender for a limited run. The mailbox letters were hardest to recreate!**
Inset **Amos' truss-rod cover has been loaned to Joe by the Arthur family**
Opposite **Joe's '51 Nocaster (left) cosies up to the '52 Telecaster formerly owned by Terry Reid**

One of the rarest – and coolest – Fenders in Bonamassa's collection is the black 1955 Stratocaster formerly owned by Howard Reed, the guitarist who replaced Cliff Gallup in Gene Vincent & His Blue Caps. Back in 1988, an 11-year-old Joe had a poster of this very guitar on his bedroom wall, and now he owns it.

Proof that patience and hard work pays off, but was it the first ever black Stratocaster? "Well there's the Jimmy Bryant one, which nobody has seen for a while and that's supposedly a '54, but it's either the first or the second. My guess is probably the second. There's photos of Howard playing this guitar in '56 or '57. Fender is doing a run of these, they're doing 100 of these. Replicating the mailbox letters has been the biggest problem."

The most surprising fact about the Howard Reed Strat is its weight, as Joe confirms: "8lb 11oz – super-heavy! [The idea that all vintage Fenders are light] is a myth. Ash is ash!"

"I was very dormant for a while and sold a bunch of stuff that I was holding from the 1990s in 2006"

Last but by no means least in this trio of legendary instruments is Amos, the korina 1958 Flying V. Given that only 98 of these instruments are documented to have left Gibson's Kalamazoo factory in 1958, we're already right at the top of the tree when it comes to collectible guitars, but there's a twist – only 10 are thought to have been manufactured with a black pickguard.

First sold in 1959 by Amos Arthur of famous family-owned music store Arthur's Music in Indianapolis, Indiana, the guitar dropped off the map for 17 or so years and was then purchased in the mid-70s by Joe's friend Norman Harris of Norman's Rare Guitars. Harris held onto it for four decades, during which the guitar was photographed for numerous books – and in 1984 >

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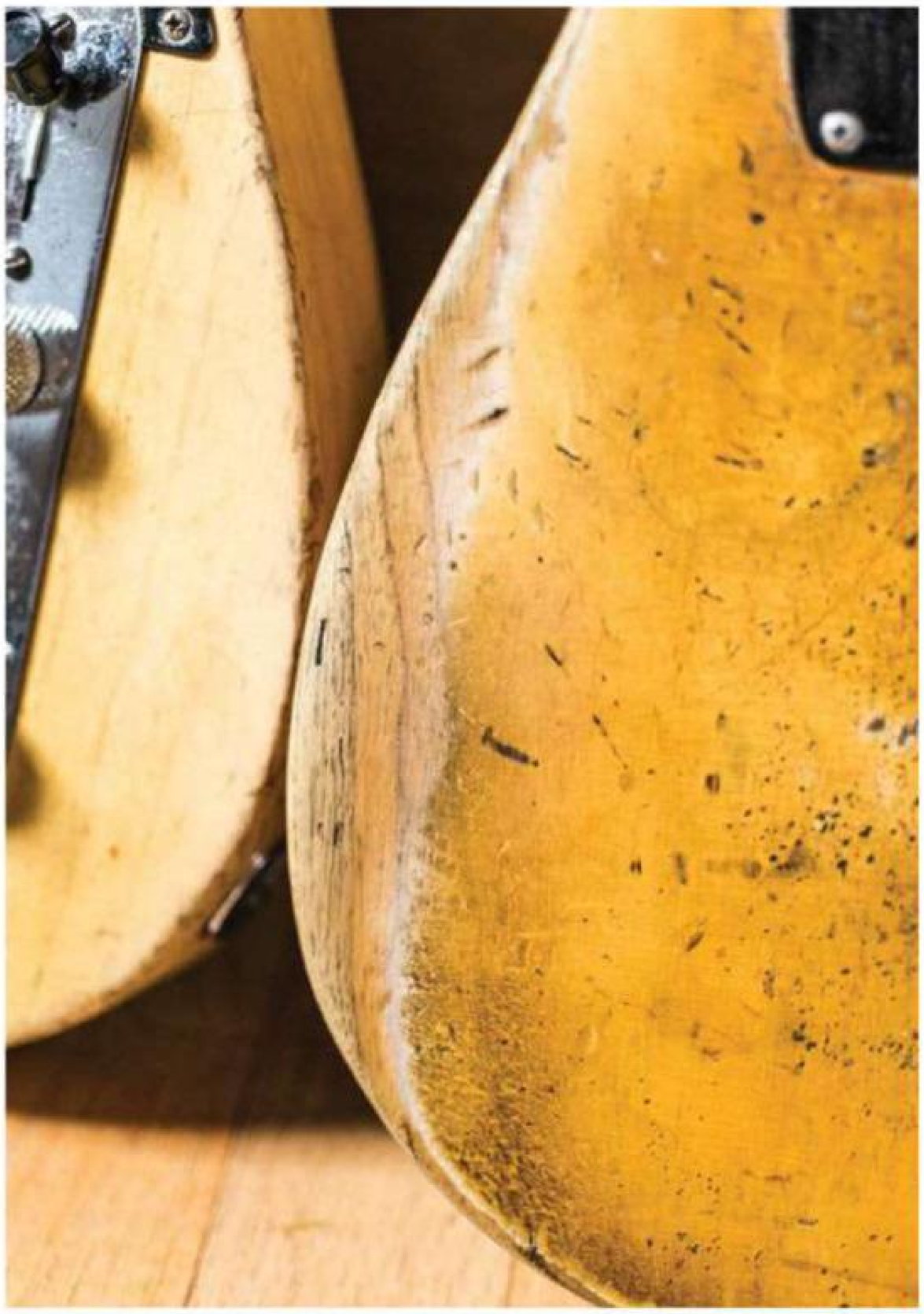

Above left, above right and inset **Reid's '52 Tele made an appearance on the Glastonbury stage back in 1971 and looked nearly as weathered in the early seventies**

even featured in *This Is Spinal Tap*. "They probably made five in that configuration," says Joe of Amos's black guard/white poker chip plastics. "The Pete Townshend one is in that configuration. Blackguard Vs were probably within the first 10. Of the Gibsons that I own, the V and the black Burst – the black '60 Standard – are probably the most valuable."

But how, we ask, does such a cool and iconic instrument sound when you plug it in? "Awesome, especially with real frets," Joe replies.

Vintage tweed

With the Reed Strat and Flying V leaning up against a '54 Twin for photography purposes – and one famous blues guitarist and a magazine editor hovering just out of shot wearing expressions of grave concern – we return to the subject of Bonamassa's current live rig, which consists of a pair of tweed Twins and a pair of tweed Bassmans.

"All the stage amps have Celestion speakers," says Joe. "There are 80-watt Celestions in the Twins. I get about 40 shows a year out of them and we have to switch them. In the Bassmans, we use 60-watt Celestions and then there's a Jensen in the upper-right on both of them because the Celestions won't clear the transformer. Even live, only the Twins are mic'd, but the Bassmans give you this sympathetic distortion. The Twins would be too clean on their own. The Bassmans grind a little bit more and make the whole soup a little squishy.

"Of the Gibsons that I own, the V and the black Burst, the black '60 Standard, are probably the most valuable"

"We put the rig together on a Sunday and Tour Supply wasn't open, so we ran out of splitter boxes. For the final split point, I said, 'well I've got this TC Electronic thing' [a Stereo Chorus – Ed], and we put it on and it was the happiest accident. When you put it on subtly it tightens up the bottom a little bit, it shears some of the bass off, and it's the secret weapon, but it's so painfully simple..."

Joe Bonamassa's new album, Blues Of Desperation, is out now on Provogue. See www.jbonamassa.com for tour dates and the latest news

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THE Guitar & Bass INTERVIEW

"I have a passion for vintage instruments, like people have for classic cars or films"

Tipped as the next big thing in contemporary blues-rock, JD Simo talks to *Guitar & Bass* about recording his latest album, learning from Bonamassa and the guitar that changed his life

Story **Mark Alexander**

JD Simo is the kind of guitarist you would enjoy recommending to your muso buddies. An advocate of all things vintage as well as a talented bluesman, he is charismatic and yet just enough of an outsider to make him a find. However, as soon as you put on his band's latest album, *Let Love Show The Way*, or better still check him out live, your outside tip will quickly become a sure bet.

It may take a couple of minutes – after all, Simo is a seasoned session player based in Nashville, who dishes out measured licks and soulful runs, rather than flashy chops. He leaves room to deliver his killer bends and pauses before hitting the high notes. But when the penny drops – usually as he holds a doublestop bend with his expressive vibrato – that's when your compadres will turn to you and gently nod their heads in approval. If you're listening to the new album, it should take roughly one minute and 10 seconds.

His mentor, Joe Bonamassa, was a little quicker off the mark. He spotted the Chicago-raised guitarist and wasted no time in pitching him to the Mascot Label Group, proclaiming Simo was "one of the best out there". It was a recommendation that carried weight. "He's one of my best friends on the planet," says Simo, whose physical appearance lies somewhere between Jim Morrison and Dr Who. "He's like an older brother to me. I couldn't have more respect for him as a person, a musician or an artist. I love him. He's opened the door for me – I couldn't be more grateful."

As well as bringing him to the attention of his new record label, Bonamassa has also invited Simo to appear on stage with him. It was a complete and comprehensive endorsement by today's undisputed blues trailblazer. Simo and his namesake group had all their stars aligned and were poised to make a follow-up to their self-titled 2012 debut album. But in inexorable style, Simo rethought the plan and went back to basics to make the most of the opportunity.

Years working as a session player had seen Simo rack up plenty of hours behind glass, and for this sonic exploration he decided to ditch the studio and record his latest offering on location, live. "That's how we like to work," he explains. "There are no edits on the record. The vocals are live. If there is >

JD (centre) with Adam Abrashoff (left) and Elad Shapiro

an overdub, I try to make it obvious. We're all in the same room together, we're trying to capture a good performance rather than assemble one."

The idea was to cut some bonus tracks to supplement material that had already been recorded, and to make life interesting the band decamped to the hallowed turf of the communal home of The Allman Brothers Band in Macon, Georgia, which is now run as a museum. As if the surroundings weren't enough, Simo also played Duane Allman's 1957 Les Paul Goldtop during the live takes.

In July 2015, *Let Love Show The Way* was laid down in a flurry of fiery jams and extended grooves at the legendary Big House. "It was a huge honour and thrill for us," says Simo. "We went for two days and within an hour we had done what we needed to do. We had all this extra time, so we recorded some songs we had just written, we re-recorded some stuff we had done already, we did some improvisations and some songs on the spot. We ended up with a lot of material." So pleased was Simo with the takes, he decided to use the sessions as the basis for the release.

It had been an industrious 48 hours, helped in no small way by the legendary guitar that had been fundamental in creating the sound of the first two Allman Brothers albums and featured on Derek and the Dominos' 1970 classic *Layla*. "It was a huge honour for me," says Simo. "The gentleman who owns the guitar is a very good friend of mine. He's been very gracious and has let me use it many times. I never got to meet Duane; he's obviously a big hero of mine, so to be in his old house and playing his old guitar was as close as I'll ever come to meeting him."

An original 1957 Goldtop is the embodiment of inspiration, steeped in a potent bath of mojo and buffed up with a thick layer of verve, so playing one with the kind of history that Duane Allman's has must have super-charged Simo's already fizzing creative juices. You can hear it on *Let Love Show The Way*, which gravitates between rock, blues and soul during 10 tracks and three bonus tunes – the energy and richness of the sessions are obvious.

As a self-confessed devotee of vintage gear, Simo was in his element, describing the fabled guitar as "stable", needing little more than new strings and a couple of tweaks

JD cuts loose on his Les Paul, with Kermit looking on from atop his Marshall head

before the recording. "It was just about setting the action, checking the intonation real quick and tweaking the pickup height just a little bit; because everybody likes that a bit different," he says.

The spirited results are a throwback to a time of musical freedom, and the unashamed grit of blues with rock, country and jazz flavours thrown in for good measure. The fact it was played out on the *Layla* guitar seems only right and fitting.

"I have a passion for vintage instruments, like people have passions for vintage cars or classic films," says Simo. "I find it interesting; it's a hobby. It's not so much about the value, I just find it interesting. I've played instruments that were worth hundreds of thousands of dollars; and some were stupefying great, there were ones that were good and some weren't that great. But when you get your hands on a vintage instrument that is truly great, there is nothing like it. There's something about it that is very special and very unique, it is inspiring. You can't unhear something. Once you hear it, you want to hear it all the time."

Simo's retro set-up for the album also extended to his amps, which consisted of a 1969 100-watt Marshall Plexi and early 1970s Traynor 1x12 with a distinctive reverb and tremolo. A couple of old wah pedals completed the line-up. "I'm a minimalist," he explains. "I am actually inspired more by limitations than by options. It's about using the volume and the tone controls [on the guitar] and trying to play with dynamics. The organic, simple approach inspires me."

"I have a passion for vintage instruments, like people have passions for vintage cars or classic films"

Simo's obsession with the tonal qualities of all things vintage has taken him on a journey that was partially concluded five years ago when he chanced upon a 50-year-old Gibson 335 in a blush of deep red. There was an affinity between musician and instrument that went further than merely tonal resonance, a fact recognised by Gibson, which is due to release a JD Simo signature ES-335 model.

LISTEN UP

SIMO
Let Love Show The Way (2016)
SIMO's latest release is a hippy romp brimming with mojo. The band deliver blues-rock with a cool 60s groove.

SIMO
Love Vol 1 (2015)
This four-track EP, containing a couple of songs from the band's debut, was recorded live in Nashville and is the first in a series of live offerings.

SIMO
Simo (2011)
The band's first full-length album sets the tone with nine glorious rocking blues tracks. The album's finale, *Evil*, steals the show.

Simo secured the original guitar in a deal that would not only change his life, but declutter it as well. "I'll die with that one," he says. "That thing changed my life. I am very indebted to that guitar because all of my friendships in the vintage guitar world all started with that guitar. I love it."

He continues: "At the time, I had never played a truly great vintage guitar, so this was the guitar that changed it for me – it showed me how good an instrument could be. I had to have it, so I ended up selling pretty much everything I had that was worth anything. I spent more money on that guitar than I had spent on anything in my life. It was the greatest thing I ever did. I turned a bunch of stuff into one thing that I loved and still love."

The deal relieved the then 24-year-old of $10,000. It was a serious investment, but one that created an unbreakable partnership that has paid off handsomely, spawning a growing following and a much-anticipated signature model. "That's nuts," he says. "It's crazy and extremely exciting. I am extremely grateful."

That's a phrase you hear Simo say a lot. Affable and gracious, his modesty belies a considerable talent that he has honed since the age of four. His refreshing approach to music and life harks back to a freer time when guitar players plugged straight into their amps and recorded live. He and his band are a throwback to the late 1960s and early 70s, when musical osmosis and exploration was commended and embraced. With a new album that is both refreshingly familiar and inspiringly uninhibited, Simo's timing couldn't be better.

Getty Images

11 TOP TIPS *Kerry King*

Slayer's Kerry King has defined thrash metal with razor-edged riffs and demented solos. Here, he gives us his best advice about playing metal, fast...

Interview **Mark Alexander**

Getty Images

1 Build right-hand speed slowly

It's important for the right hand to establish speed, but you can't establish speed if you start by trying to be a 220bpm player when you're a 150bpm kind of player – you've got to work up to it. My suggestion for that is to use your phone. There are so many things that you can do with your phone now, like getting a metronome app. So for working up speed, you can start at 150bpm and play your riff at that speed, and if 220bpm or some ridiculous number is what you're looking for, work your way up to that. That's the most structured way to build up your speed.

2 Warm up

I'm mid-tour now, so I don't really think about anything like that, but at the beginning of a tour I'll run through some Slayer riffs. I'll also play *Propaganda* by Sepultura because that's a good pedalling song but it's not fast, and then I'll graduate to *Hostile* by Pantera because that's a bit faster and then, when I'm oiled and ready to play, I'll start playing *Reborn* or *Jihad*; Slayer stuff that has what I call broken rhythms. It gives your hand different ways in which to warm up. It's about getting prepared. I find myself warming up for longer because I want to be good. We also open up with *Repentless*, which isn't the easiest song in the set to play. Another thing I do to warm up for a show is to play whatever leads I have in the first five or six songs. I play those two or three times each. I know what they sound like if I'm playing them correctly, so I don't even plug in – I won't bother anyone else with my repetition. Sometimes, I neglect that and I hear it back a few days later and realise I didn't play it that good, so I've been concentrating on that. We have a very physical show, so I stretch my neck and my back every night. My hands get a stretch when they're doing their thing anyway.

3 Work on your vibrato

I don't even think about it. I just do it. I think Gary [Holt – Slayer's other guitarist] has a harder vibrato than I do. It's your own personal style, and how it evolves depends on how much you want to make it sing on its own. It has a lot to do with muscle development and getting calluses at the end of your fingers. When we are rehearsing for tours, we go from working on new material with no leads at all to live show stuff that has lots of leads. Sometimes I have to call time on practice because my fingers are dust; I have to just go home. You've got to build up the stamina.

4 Put on a show

Slayer is more than a show. We interact with the fans and they interact with us with their mosh pit. It's an event. If I wanted it to be a perfect musical event, I wouldn't be up there headbanging wearing 15lb chains hanging around my knees. If I stood still, I would play everything note for note, but when you put on a show, I think note for note gets a little lost. If you're playing great songs and the performance is awesome but it's not like watching a symphony, that's OK. It's a personal choice. You've got to figure out what you want to do and you've got to be OK with that decision. Do I wish I hit every note? Yeh that would be nice, but the show wouldn't be as intense.

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5 Bend the rules

I would revert back to the metronome. If you want to get faster at something, master it and then bump it by 5bpm. That's kind of remedial, but guitar is remedial – you don't have to think outside of the box. It's cool to think outside the box when you're trying to be cool and different, but as far as getting better and faster, it shouldn't be that tricky, but it is a lot of work.

I've used the term archaic to describe my solos, but demented also works. And it's even more applicable to playing rhythms. If it's not in key, it doesn't matter as long as it sounds cool. At the end of the day, if you like the way it sounds, it doesn't matter what key it's in. Slayer's bent that rule since day one.

My lead playing evolved from that style of writing. So if we were playing a rhythm that was all in a major scale, I'm sure we would do leads in a minor, even though playing a major would make the most sense musically. You just branch out to see how you can bend the musical rules. That's the most fun thing we do. Some people don't like our lead style – it's unique and it sounds like Slayer. It's like Tom's voice. When you hear Tom's voice, you know it's Slayer. When you hear us playing lead, you know it's Slayer. There's something to be said for that.

6 Write riffs with a metronome

I've got a metronome app on my phone because I often have riffs in my head that I think will go together but when I play them to a beat, one will work and the other will be a different tempo. I use the metronome so I know before I show Paul [Bostaph – Slayer's drummer] the riffs work together.

7 Don't become reliant on the whammy bar

Stay away from the whammy until you're out of ideas, because it is way too easy to rely on it. Of course, there's a skill to it. When you're playing something, it's so easy to go to the bar and hit it and it sounds great. That's why I try to stay away from it – you can get tunnel vision and get married to your bar. More than I am. And that's not what people want. You want to use the whammy bar as an accent, not something you rely on. Sometimes, yeah, you need a big divebomb and you want to hit a harmonic and bend the fuck out of it, and I've done that too many times in my career. But I like it; it's Slayer, it sounds good.

> "Stay away from the whammy bar until you're out of ideas. It's too easy to rely on it"

8 Balance your lead playing

In *Cast The First Stone*, Gary starts out with a guitar harmony on his own and then just rips through the whole thing on top of a slow rhythm. I recorded my solo after his and I wasn't going to go head to head with Gary Holt, so I left it really open. It's got a lot of air in it, so it accents what he plays perfectly, I think. That's one way of playing it, but it can be all over the map. In *You Against You*, it sounds like a guitar duel.

Andrew Stuart

Getty Images

9 Get your tone right

When I used to use an EQ, everyone would look at it and it would be the exact opposite of what people thought it would be. If you were to look at my EQ, it would look like a frown rather than a smile. I liked the mids because everything else I could get from my head. I used to play a show with a Marshall JCM800 and a Boss 10-band EQ, and I would have my sound. That, to everyone's surprise, including Marshall, was that frown. The EQ would start at zero and go all the way up for the mids and then back down to zero for the treble. It wasn't for leads, it was for rhythm. It made them full and chunky [Marshall released a signature Kerry King JCM800 2203KK amp – a single-channel, all-valve 100-watt monster with no reverb or effects. It featured a switchable signature sound section that included two adjustable controls: assault and gate. Assault controlled the extent of King's signature EQ boost, while gate was an adjustable, studio-quality, ultra-fast noise reduction unit]. My sound is based on a rhythm sound, but for lead, that's not so good. So for lead I have an overdrive on a little bit, and generally I'm on a wah just to get a little more high end out of it. If I dialled in a lead sound, I wouldn't like it for my rhythm sound. And since my rhythm is the majority of the set, that's what I base it on.

10 Don't just mirror

A lot of bands with two guitars, when they have two lead sections mirror – with one guy on lower register and the other on the higher register. I don't do that. I start on the higher register and Gary will be on the lower register. By a third of the way through the solo, I'll be on the lower register and he'll be on the higher register and by the last third, we will have switched back. It's way cooler than mirroring. It's not like you've just plugged in a harmoniser. The solos actually interact with each other. It's an interesting thing that I like to incorporate into our solos.

> "When I realised Gary was going to be playing leads on the record I knew I had to step it up"

11 Learn to work with other guitarists

Gary Holt is a phenomenal player. I've been here forever, so I couldn't let the new guy show me up the whole time. I've paid attention to what I've been playing, especially on this recording [Slayer's 2015 album *Repentless*]. I am trying to be a cleaner player with innovative ideas that will bounce well off the innovative ideas he's got. We've just played how we've played forever and then, when I realised Gary was going to be playing leads on the record I knew I had to step it up because Gary was going to come in here and kick the doors down. I just wanted to pay more attention to my leads in that respect. I still have my archaic, demented leads, but in instances where I'm playing right behind or right in front of something Gary's doing and he's ripping through it, I want to be more musical.

LISTEN UP

SLAYER
Reign In Blood (1986)
Slayer's third LP, their first with Rick Rubin at the helm, is 28:58 of frantic, genre-defining evil, still regarded by many as the heaviest album of all time.

SLAYER
South Of Heaven (1988)
The classic Slayer line-up of Araya, King, Hanneman and Lombardo slowed the tempos down on the follow-up to *Reign In Blood* and arguably sounded even scarier as a result.

SLAYER
Seasons In The Abyss (1990)
Possibly Slayer's most accessible record, the third in their unholy trinity of classic albums features the pulverising thrash of *War Ensemble* and the downright creepy ode to Ed Gein, *Dead Skin Mask*.

Getty Images

Photo courtesy of: Ben Gibson Photography - Artist: Liam Cromby - We Are The Ocean

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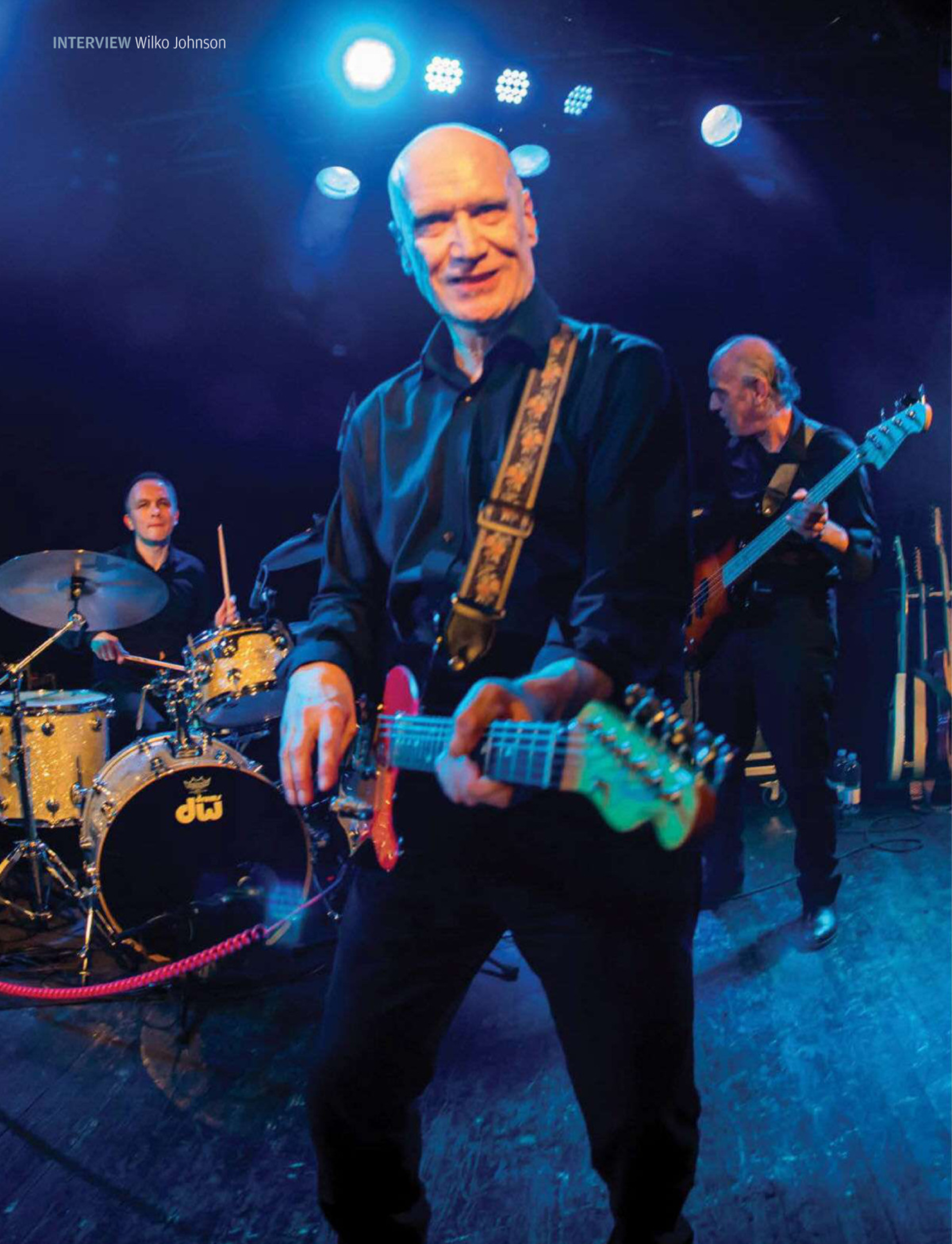
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How I got started...

Wilko's World

G&B catches up with Wilko Johnson and hears how he fell in love with his first Tele, how Johnny Kidd changed everything, and how Dr Feelgood were formed...

Story **David Gallant**

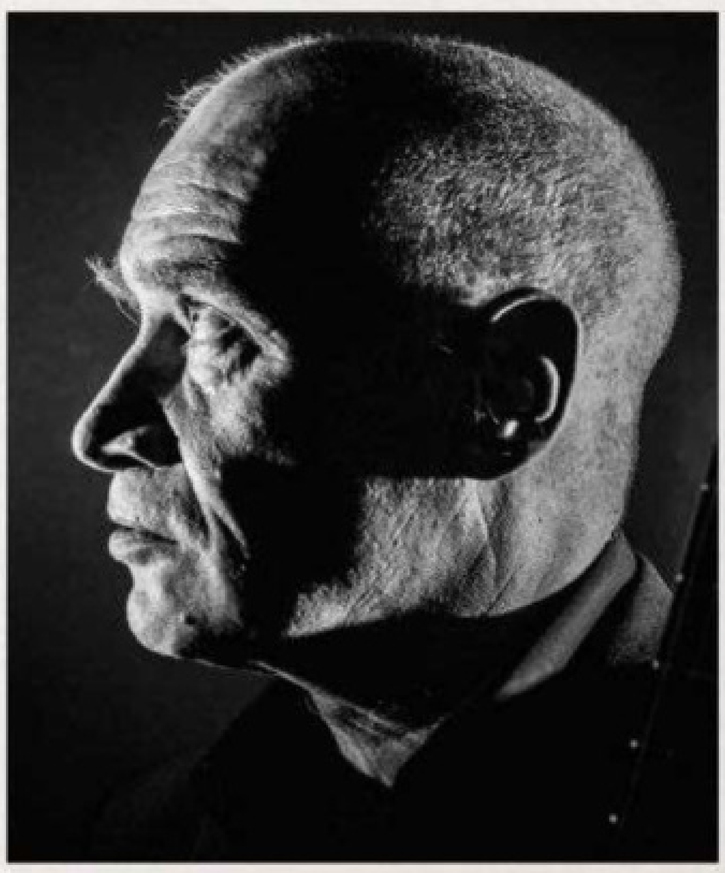
"One saturday, I was walking across the living room at home and Saturday Club was playing on the radio," starts Wilko Johnson, former guitarist with the iconic 70s band Dr Feelgood, known by their fans as 'The Feelgoods'. "And this guy goes: 'This is Johnny Kidd & the Pirates'. And I remember the sound of this guitar. It made me feel kind of seasick – wow – it was fantastic.

"Later that same day, there was the TV show called Thank Your Lucky Stars and, sure enough, Johnny Kidd & the Pirates were on. And I see something kind of unusual, right... there's Johnny Kidd and there are only three guys in the band, right... there's a drummer, there's a bass player and there's a bloke with a guitar. I was amazed because he was playing in a style that combined rhythm guitar with lead guitar. And then I found out that there wasn't some other guy playing, there was just this one guy who was making all that music and I thought... that's what I want to do.

"And from that moment on, I wanted to play exactly like him – I wanted to BE him. I wanted to be Mick Green! Of course, I never did quite get it!"

Johnson remembers the family audio equipment and how he acquired his first disc: "We had a very primitive record player with a two-inch oblong speaker. There wasn't even an auto change. It used to play one disc at a time. When The Rolling Stones' first album came out, I remember taking the day off school with a couple of mates to go and buy it. We went into the record shop and while we were buying it, I went looking into the second-hand singles boxes and there I found a Johnny Kidd & the Pirates record – in fact, it was *A Shot Of Rhythm And Blues*. And, of course, I'd just discovered Mick Green. And I thought, 'cor blimey, it's that bloke I saw on Thank Your Lucky Stars'. We bought the Stones' album and the single, and spent the afternoon playing the Stones album – which was fantastic. And I was also playing this Johnny Kidd single. And I remember saying to my mate... 'yeah, yeah, the Stones are fantastic, fantastic, but I really like this Mick Green bloke'. Of course, the Stones were so exciting, and of course the whole look of them was kind of barbaric, you knew there was no way your parents were going to dig them, not like The Beatles. Funny that, I actually went to see The Beatles... but if you were going to start a band, you definitely wanted it to sound like The Rolling Stones."

> "From that moment on, I wanted to be Mick Green. Of course, I never did quite get it!"



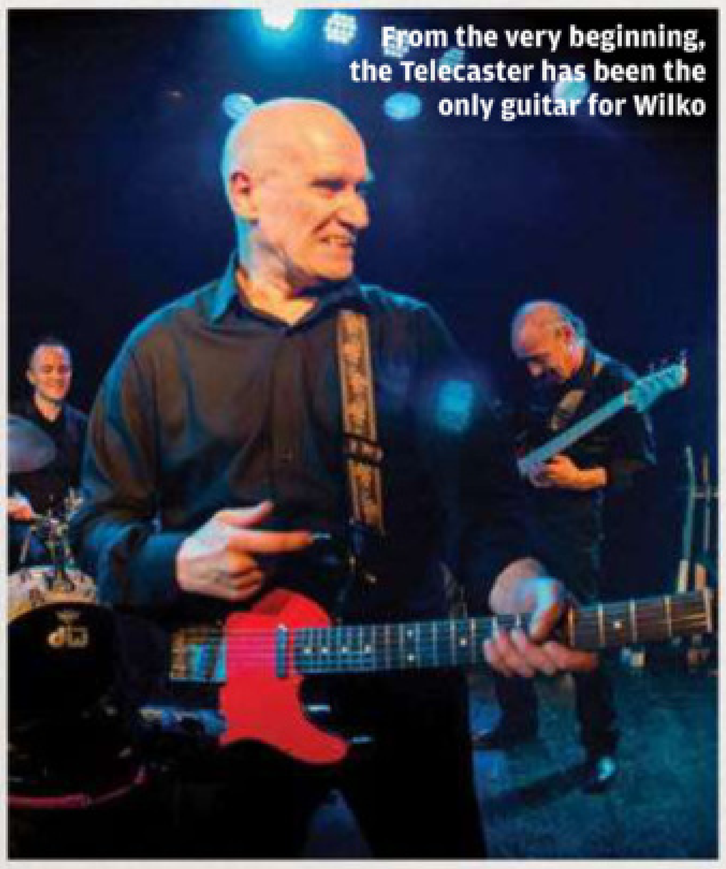
Johnson admits that he "knew absolutely nothing about music" when he got his first guitar. "I just fancied myself with a guitar," he laughs. "I'm also left-handed, so I started playing it backwards way-round like Paul McCartney. And I was useless, right. Everyone at school could play better than me. So when a right-handed guitar that was better than my guitar came up for sale at school, I thought 'right, I'm going to learn to play right-handed and I'm going to buy this guitar and I'm going to tell myself that I'm just beginning, so I won't feel so useless and crappy'. I kind of started again, pointing stage-left as it were. I was 15." The guitar in question was a Watkins Rapier, "an English imitation Stratocaster," says Johnson, "they're quite good guitars actually. But the only guitar I have ever wanted to play was a Tele, 'cos Mick Green played a Tele and, also, they're great guitars.

"Anyway, in the window of this music shop in Southend was this Fender Telecaster. I knew this Fender Telecaster cost £107 and this was way beyond what I could afford... my dad was a gas fitter who used to work for £12 a week, so you can see that a guitar costing over £100 is just something to dream about. I used to go and stare at this thing in the window. And then, I think they were having trouble shifting it, anyway, it was in the shop for a long time and then they cut the price to just under £100. And I thought... 'I gotta have it... I gotta have it'. My mum would >

never allow me to have anything on credit. So I went into the shop and I said, 'listen, I really want this Telecaster. Can I put £10 down on the guitar and then pay you every week however much I can save up until I've paid for it?', so I said, 'you keep the guitar'. And then what used to happen was, I'd save up all my dinner money and everything. Then on a Saturday I'd go into the music shop and they'd give me this little book and I'd pay them however much I'd saved up and they'd bring the guitar out from the back and I'd sit there playing it all afternoon. And then when the shop closed, I'd have to give it them back... anyway, this went on for some time and eventually I persuaded my girlfriend to draw all the money out of her Post Office savings book and buy the Telecaster – which she did. When I got this guitar, it was like a dream, it was beautiful. And I've still got that guitar."

"You know, it was never my ambition to be a musician. It just happened," says Johnson. "All the bands I had at school... you were practising and rehearsing away and getting a gig down the youth club. I can't remember having any ambitions to do it professionally. Dr Feelgood was exactly the same thing. John [Martin, drummer] and I were lifelong friends – our mothers used to push us around in prams together! Sparko [bassist John Sparks] and Lee [Brilleaux] were four to five years younger than us. We got together because we wanted to play that Stones-style music. We were doing it for pure fun, which is what you should do it for. We were actually completely unknown and we had a couple of years trying to find out what we were doing. It was pretty good and different from what was going down at that time. So as soon as we started to play in London, we started getting very popular. We were getting in the music papers and that sort of thing, thinking 'blimey, we might even get a record deal'. By then, if you like, it had become serious, but it certainly didn't sound serious! It seemed to take hundreds of years before we got the record deal with United Artists, but of course it was only a few weeks" – their first album, *Down By The Jetty*, came out in 1973.

> "I persuaded my girlfriend to draw all the money out of Post Office savings and buy the Tele"



From the very beginning, the Telecaster has been the only guitar for Wilko

So where did the name Dr Feelgood come from? "Funnily enough," says Johnson, "there is a rock 'n' roll song called *Dr Feelgood* recorded by Willie Perryman, or Piano Red as he was known, from New Orleans. And, in fact, this record was so successful that he changed his name to Dr Feelgood And The Interns. This was all in the early 60s before I knew anything about anything. Johnny Kidd & the Pirates did a version of this song, *Dr Feelgood* on the B-side of one of their singles, and when we had our first rehearsal together I remember saying to the guys, 'listen, we've got to be just like Johnny Kidd & the Pirates', 'cos we had the same kind of line-up – a singer and three musicians. A bit later that day, Marco comes knockin' on my door and says, 'listen, we've decided to call the band Dr Feelgood'. I said, 'I don't think we

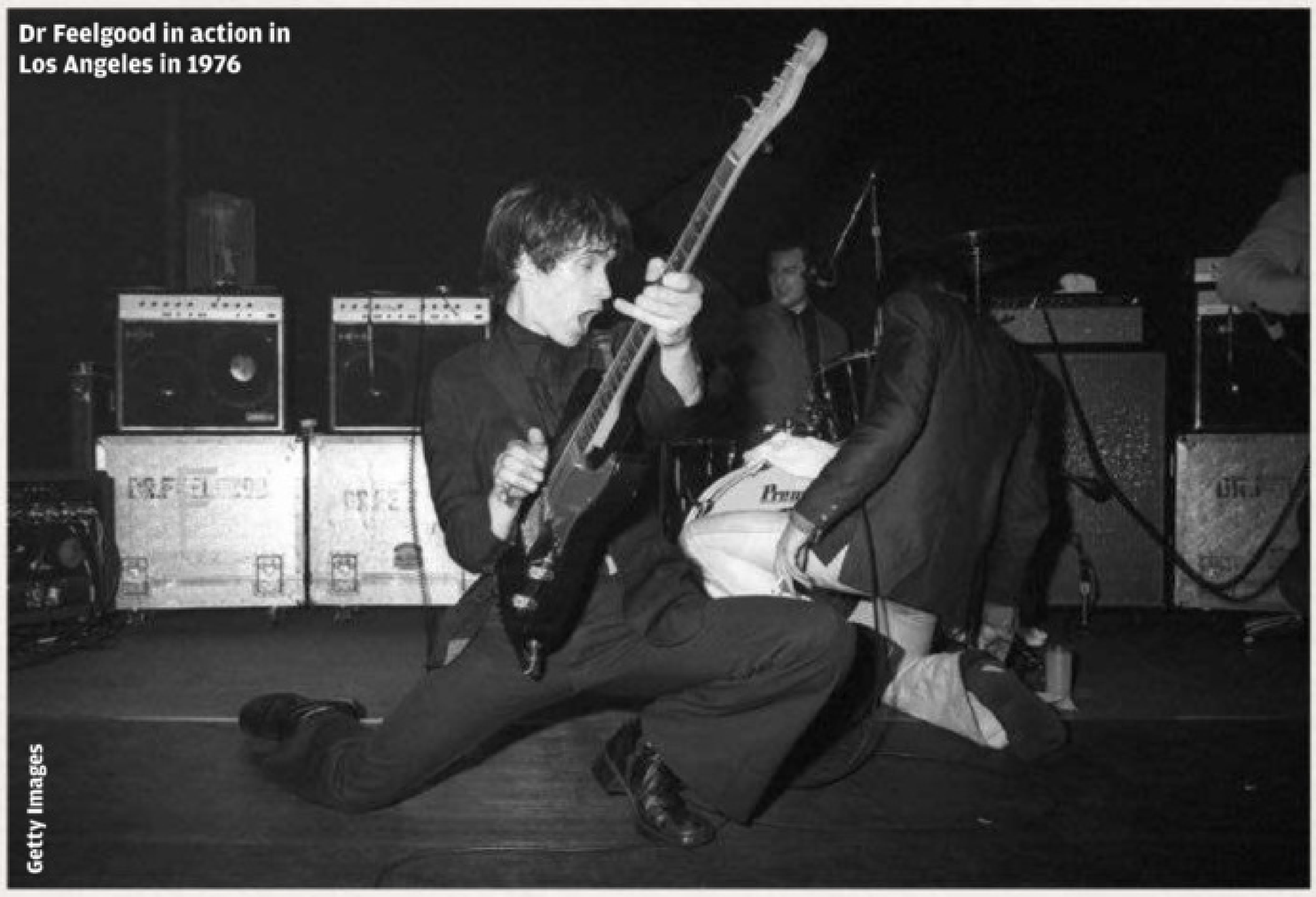
can do that, it's been used before, you know'. He said, 'nobody in Canvey Island's goin' to know'. So we did!

"When Dr Feelgood started to get successful, I was still using the Post Office guitar, and I thought, 'this guitar's a bit sentimental now to take on the road', so I got an identical 1962 Telecaster, sprayed it black and got a red scratchplate for it – giving it my distinctive looks, right, to match with the shirt I was wearing at the time!"

Amplification was served by a Vox Beatle with a speaker cab that had four 12-inch speakers and two horns mounted on a chrome framework. "But it was very bulky and very difficult to carry around," says Johnson. "So I traded it in for one of these HH transistor combos, which I went on to use for many years." More recently, Johnson has been using a Cornell: "It's the best amp I've had. When you get an amp that's real good, you should be able to set all the controls at neutral and the volume at seven or whatever. And when you plug it in, it should sound good. If you've got to start tweaking it about to get your sound, it's not what you want. What strings do I use? I used to use Rotosound strings. I appeared in their advert [laughs].

"As I got less celebrated, though, I got less Rotosound strings! I use 13-52s. I think you should use the heaviest-gauge string that you are comfortable with. They give you a louder and truer note than light strings."

Before we leave, Johnson concludes: "John Lee Hooker was one of the greatest musicians who ever lived. They're just so bloody good these people who recorded on Chess records in the 50s and 60s. Muddy Waters, Bo Diddley, Chuck Berry – and Howlin' Wolf's guitarist, Hubert Sumlin – some of the best guitar playing you'll ever hear. What a player. They're almost unknown to the world at large, and yet... kind of everything springs from what they did. John Lee Hooker, I kiss his bloody shoe. It's all on feelin' – you can't buy it, you can't read it in a book."



Dr Feelgood in action in Los Angeles in 1976

Getty Images

The current line-up of The Wilko Johnson Band, with Dylan Howe on drums and Norman Watt-Roy on bass

How Not To Disappear Completely

London trio Daughter released the follow-up to their critically lauded debut album *If You Leave* in January. *G&B* met guitarist Igor Haefeli to find out how they went about making something even better

Story **Gary Walker**

How do you follow a stunning debut album awash with tales of shuddering heartbreak, majestic widescreen soundscapes and fine guitar interplay that elevated you overnight from bedsit demos to a position as one of the most cherished indie bands in the nation? Do it again. Only bigger, bolder, more heart-rending and in the case of Daughter's second album, the sublime *Not To Disappear*, better.

Three years on from the release of the silver-selling *If You Leave*, which spawned the breakthrough singles *Youth* and *Human*, the London three-piece, built around the romantic and musical relationship between vocalist Elena Tonra and Swiss-born guitarist Igor Haefeli, flew out to New York to start work on the follow-up. While that first record was a coruscating treasure, adorned with glacial clean guitar sounds, oceans of reverb and Tonra's frank explorations of love and loss, the follow-up is a giant, ambitious stride forward. Across its 10 tracks, the young band display an exhilarating mastery of dynamics and composition – not least on the affecting *Doing The Right Thing*, written about Tonra's grandmother's battle with Alzheimer's.

A stridant, bombastic mood is set by opening track *New Ways*, with Haefeli's Gibson Les Paul scything through the dreamy ambient wash in glorious fashion. The guitarist confirms it was a conscious decision to open the record with a statement of intent.

"*New Ways* was the first track we wrote for the album and straightaway felt like the track that should open it," he says. "It starts fairly calmly and then there's that big instrumental section. I quite like the surprise of it.

"I'm really happy with the album, and what people seem to have taken from it is that it's more confident and more layered, but I still hope that it can also move people in the same way that *If You Leave* did. We didn't want to do the same thing as our first record, and I'm really glad people have picked that up. It's the happiest I've ever been with anything we've done. It's quite hard to take a step back, and when you're in the depths of making the album you hear every little thing that no one else can hear.

"It felt like the right time and Elena had some aggression to put into the songs from a writing perspective. Just from playing gigs a lot, even the songs from *If You Leave* got a little louder and a little more rocky and we wanted to bring that to the record."

Haefeli shared production duties with Nicolas Vernhes at his Rare Book Room studio in Green Point Brooklyn, following the French-born producer's stints with American acts The War On Drugs, Animal Collective and Deerhunter.

"When we spoke to him, we felt we were on the same page about what we wanted to achieve with the record and the way he likes to approach making a record," says Haefeli.

"We kicked it off at the start of 2014 and went until April this year, and then went to New York for two months to work with Nicolas. We had a really good sense of where the songs were at because of how long we'd

Getty Images

Haefeli playing his Fender Pawn Shop Mustang Special at The Forum in London in January

Daughter (left to right): drummer Remi Aguilella, Elena Tonra and Igor Haefeli

been working on them. We had pretty strong demos already, so a lot of it was about transferring those ideas over to the master sessions. For two months, we went at it in that way and ended up re-recording most of what we had. The way we work, we'll generally have too much and then start stripping it down, and things still change until halfway through mixing. It's never a finished thing until we have to deliver it. This time round, we just kept a bit more, because it just felt right."

"I have a lot of surplus pedals, I keep telling myself I need to put them on eBay, but it's hard!"

Daughter met in 2010 while they were fellow students at the Institute Of Contemporary Music in London, where Tonra – born to Irish-Italian parents – grew up. She had been performing solo, playing songs on an acoustic guitar and Haefeli's clever, expansive guitar work, jazz education and mastery of delay and reverb made for a natural fit. After releasing a couple of home-recorded EPs via the Communion label formed by Mumford & Sons' Ben Lovett they signed to 4AD, and things have moved at pace since then. Haefeli's playing, too, has been on an evolutionary journey, and like many of the current crop of guitarists in alternative rock, he cites Radiohead's Jonny Greenwood as a formative influence.

"When I was about 14, I was more into punk and playing a lot of powerchords," he admits. "Then I got into electronic music growing up, because there was a lot of that in the small city I was growing up in, in Switzerland, and that brought me towards bands who were trying to mix the both, like Radiohead, and I got into artists like Björk. I went to a jazz conservatory for an hour a week for about a year. I wasn't necessarily any good at it, but it brought a bit of theory and mindfulness about what's going on in a song."

A vast guitar sound such as Haefeli's calls for an equally sizable pedalboard, and he admits he's something of a stompbox magpie: "When I started getting into effects that was a big game-changer for me because I realised with delay and reverb I could almost make melodies that were not necessarily there, with all the harmonics and the little magic that happens within reverberation and delay.

"For a really long time I was just using multi-effects, and it was only when I moved to London that I started buying single pedals and assembling a collection. I keep on buying them and I haven't sold one! I have a lot of surprlus and I keep telling myself I need to put them on eBay, but it's hard for me!

"Some of the ones I still have on my live pedalboard are the first pedals I bought. One that I bought really early on was the Boss Blues Driver with the Keeley mod, and I still have that on my board. I use that a lot for the bowed sound and a lot of the more heavily distorted stuff. I use a [Roland] JC-120 on stage, and brought that to the studio for the >

THREE BETWEEN TWO

When it comes to live guitars, Daughter keep things pretty simple, with Tonra mainly sticking to her Cabronita Telecaster, and Haefeli largely using his Gibson Les Paul Standard. However, he's in danger of losing another of his Les Pauls to his bandmate: "The two guitars I use the most are a Les Paul Standard from the early 2000s that I bought second-hand in Chicago and a Fender Pawn Shop Mustang Special, which I like because you can split the coils, so it's humbuckers but they have the coils split just above each one of them. You can get a great variety of sounds from that guitar, and it's nice to play too. Elena uses mainly a Telecaster Cabronita, the reissue version. She has a Tele Deluxe for a few songs, and she keeps on stealing my Les Paul Special with the P-90s in, which she really likes – she uses it more than I do now!"

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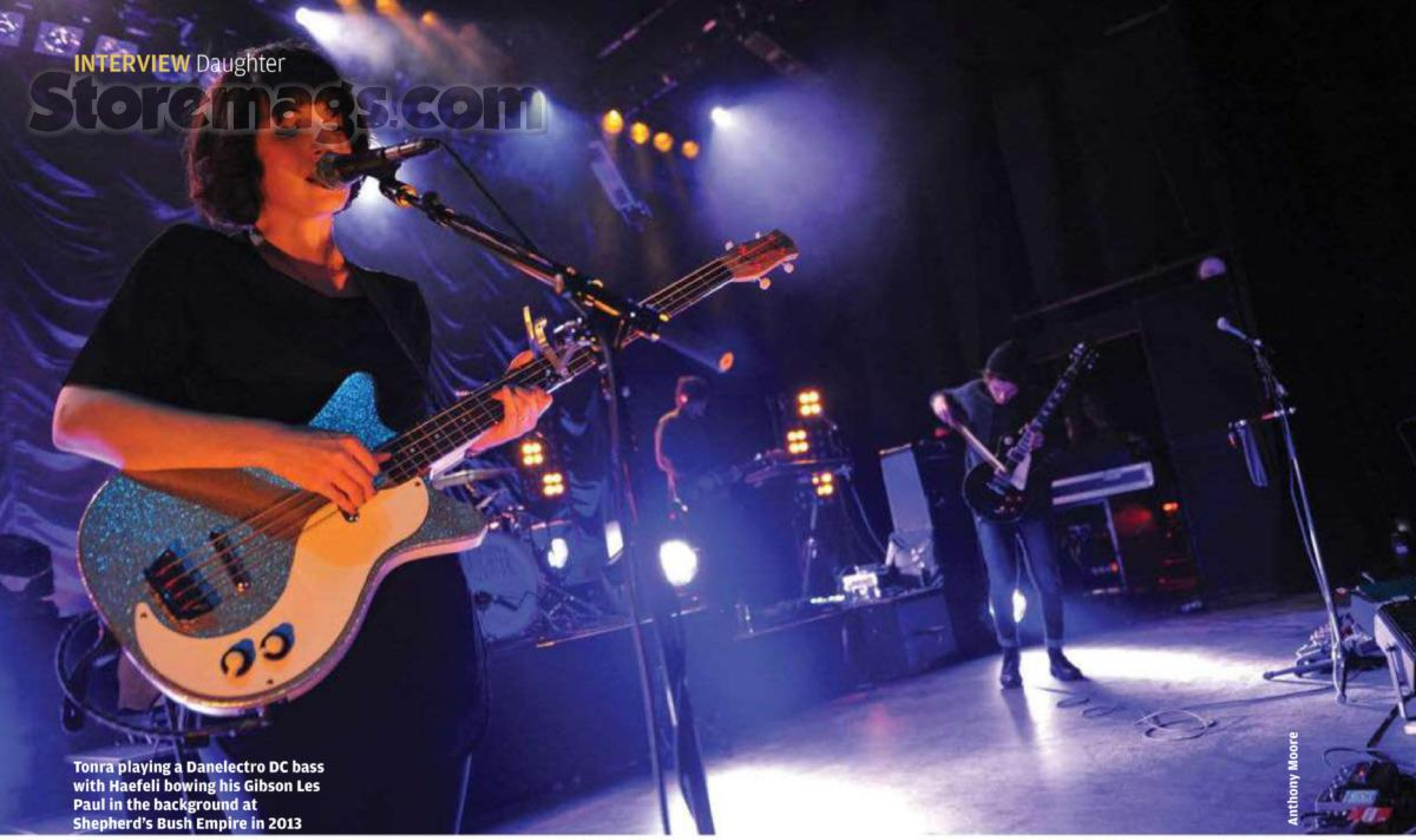


Tonra playing a Danelectro DC bass with Haefeli bowing his Gibson Les Paul in the background at Shepherd's Bush Empire in 2013

Anthony Moore

album too, one of the newer ones with a stereo effects loop. And then we bypassed the preamp and used a Chandler TG2, the EMI reissue preamps. We'd output the preamp to the effects loop of the JC-120 because it can get quite noisy and hissy. We had an amazing clean sound.

"As a producer, I really like to have choices of different amps and sounds readily available. We had a complex system and used a lot of different stuff, like this old Laney head, an old Ampeg Gemini II, a Reverbrocket, an old Vox... just depending on the song, we'd run through different amps and decide what was best.

"I use the JC-120 live, and for a while was splitting to a Twin too, which was off stage, but I've been trying to simplify that set-up because there's stereo mics on the JC-120 and then a stereo DI as well, and then the Twin, so it was five channels and too many variables!

"I really enjoy just using the power amp and speakers in the JC, so I got one of the Audio Kitchen The Big Trees – a pedal which is a tube preamp that's absolutely brilliant and has two channels on it – just using that as my preamp in between all my dirt pedals and my boost and delays and reverbs.

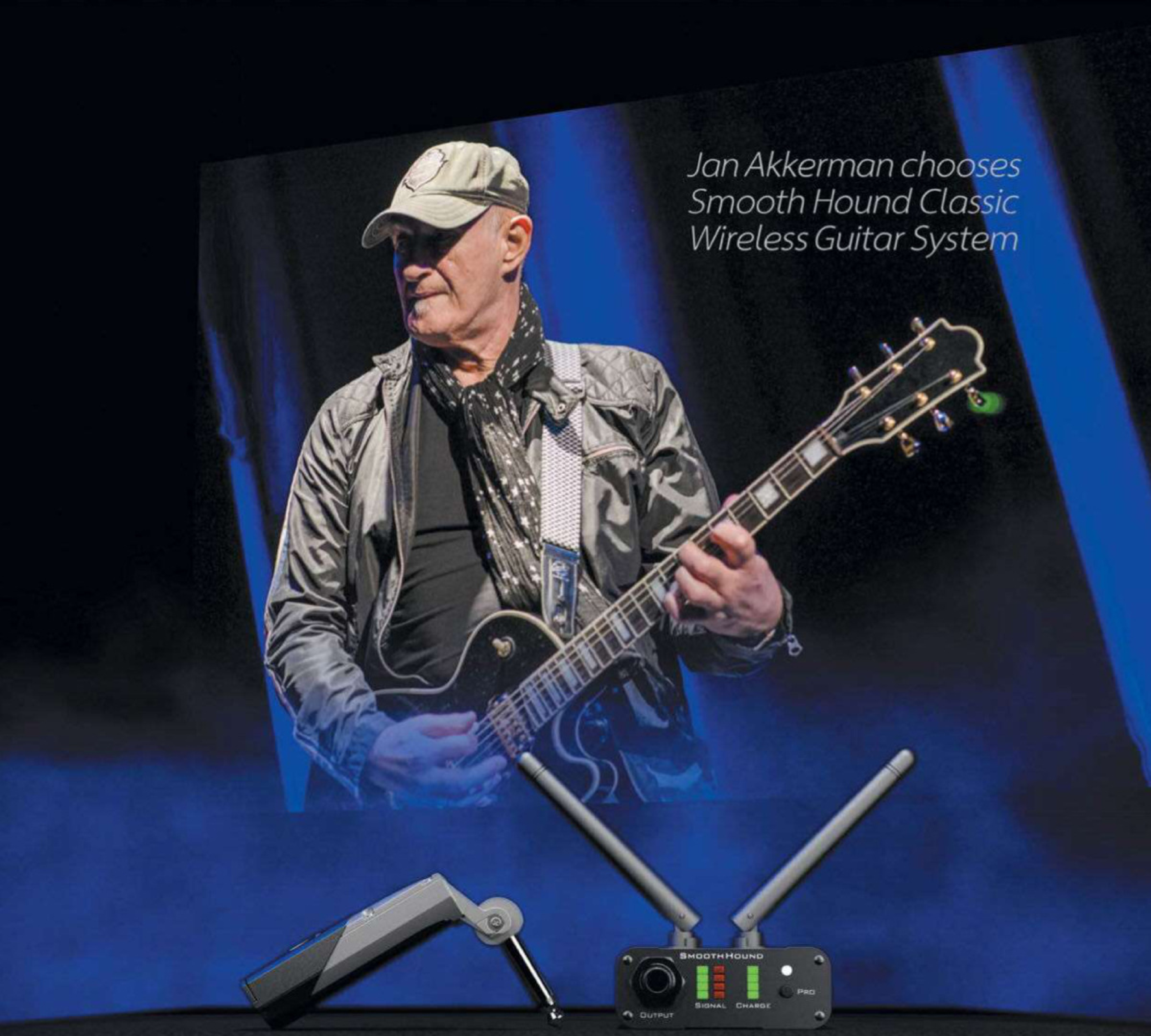
"I use the Memory Man with Hazarai for mostly reverse, because I think nothing else does the reverse delay as well as that, then a Strymon TimeLine and the Brigadier as well, then the Eventide Space reverb. I'm really happy with the Space, it's brilliant."

The flipside to producing an album so ambitious in scale and musicality is, of course, the challenge of recreating it live. When *G&B* was invited to watch Daughter in the intimate converted-church confines of Bristol's Trinity Centre back in November, they were taking tentative first steps with their newly expanded sound. The willowy, shy Tonra was apologetic for their rustiness, but by the time of their 6 Music Festival show in February, we witness a formidable force. The singer gently picks out beatific patterns on her Cabronita Telecaster and Haefeli, one of the most inventive players in indie music today, wrings mayhem and majesty from a sonic toolkit stocked with the finest drive, delay, reverb, tremolo and octave effects, and takes a cello bow to his Les Paul Standard. We ask the guitarist whether it was a daunting experience. "To an extent," he replies. "We work really hard at trying to bring it to the stage.

"It's quite funny because for *If You Leave* we worked out our set-up and got a fourth musician, who we still have for this record, and got everything sorted. I felt confident that it would be a lot easier for the second record to bring that to the stage, but I found it a real struggle at first because we really pushed ourselves sonically. We used the software we were using as an instrument, and the studio is a context where we liberated ourselves from the constraints of playing live. We don't use backing tracks, but sometimes we trigger loops and they're human-triggered, so if there's any mistakes or improv in the spur of the moment, that can happen.

"There's nothing worse than seeing a band that are really great on record and the sonic identity is really part of the band, and then not find that on stage. I think that's really underwhelming and I'd rather not be that band, so we work really hard."

> "There's nothing worse than seeing a band that are great on record and not find that on stage"



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DIY WORKSHOP

GRETSCH CONVERSION PART TWO

Our Gretsch project gathers pace as **Huw Price** separates the fretboard from the neck, strips the headstock veneer and readies the body for the next step...

1 Black stain that had soaked right through the wood, coupled with damage around the bushing holes and the four nameplate pin holes, meant that this headstock overlay couldn't be re-used

2 Remarkably for Gretsch, the dark strip of wood dividing the two maple sections runs straight through the centre line. The only way to get the overlay wood and glue residue off the headstock was with some careful scraping

3 This pin nail passes through the slot at the 20th fret into the neck wood beneath. A corresponding pin at the first fret should help to locate the fretboard when it's being re-glued and prevent it from sliding off-centre

4 Leaving the frets in helps to transfer the heat through the board while protecting the wood from the iron

Well, the old Gretsch has dried off and settled down, so it's time to crack on with the 6120 conversion. The next jobs I have lined up are to separate the fingerboard from the neck and strip off the headstock veneer. The body also needs to be readied for f-hole resizing and the installation of trestle bracing. That means the top is going to come off, and so the binding has to be removed. You've guessed it – yet more scary stuff involving heat and sharp objects. So, crossing my fingers while I still have some, let's get to it.

Overlay obliteration

There were various reasons why I couldn't retain the original headstock inlay. It was badly damaged in the areas around the tuner holes, which seems odd because there is no evidence of any tuners other than the original Waverlys ever having been fitted. Perhaps, then, the original bushings were glued in and took some timber with them when they were removed for respraying **1**.

Since this is an Anniversary model, the overlay had originally been painted black. This allowed Gretsch to use up scraps of maple veneer, and this overlay had a join down one side. The maple had also been stained black at some point and there was no way to return the wood to its natural colour. Lastly, there were four nail holes left from the pins that secured the metal Anniversary nameplate, and the 6120 horseshoe logo won't cover those up.

It would have been nice to be able to retain the original logo, but on these models Gretsch used some sort of pearloid plastic rather than genuine pearl. Paint stripper had taken its toll and although it looked OK from a distance, close-up the logo was just a shrunken mess of congealed plastic.

I'm not sure what glue Gretsch used for the headstock veneers, but I can report that if it had used the same stuff for neck joints there might have been fewer failures. No matter how much heat I applied with a clothes iron, it proved very reluctant to let go. The maple more or less disintegrated, leaving a powdery layer of sawdust and glue behind. With the wood removed, I cleaned off the residue using a Stanley knife blade as a scraper **2**.

Locating pins

I know from past experience that gluing fingerboards onto necks can be a tricky business. Before it grips, glue provides a lovely slippery surface for the board to slide around on, and clamps can push the board all over the place; I find that locating pins make the whole process much easier.

With that in mind, I pulled out the first and 20th frets and drilled a pilot hole through each fret slot into the neck beneath – one on the treble side and the other on the bass side. Small pin nails were tapped through the holes then removed. Hopefully, these pins will make it easier to glue the board back onto the neck later 3.

Lifting the board

Before dismantling a neck, it's important to test that the truss rod functions properly. It's not unknown for old truss-rod threads to be stripped, or for rods to be snapped. Fortunately, this one worked fine, so I slackened it off, removed the bolt and work on the fretboard commenced.

Veneer excepted, the Gretsch factory seemed to favour hide glue, so heat was needed to soften the fingerboard glue. This time, I used a clothes iron on its maximum setting with the steam turned off. Leaving the frets installed ensures the iron doesn't burn the wood, and some people maintain the metal transfers the heat more efficiently. I worked on one small area at a time, positioning the iron and setting a timer for 10 minutes 4.

The trickiest part was getting the separation started. Although the iron softens the glue, I found it necessary to use a putty knife, too. I also heated the putty knife on a gas ring to ease things along a little and eventually got it to slide under one corner of the fretboard in the nut area.

The key here is to work slowly and be patient. As soon as the putty knife stops sliding under the board, pull it out then heat it up and go a bit further in. When it stops for a second time, put the iron over the next few frets, wait for another 10 minutes and then repeat the whole process 5.

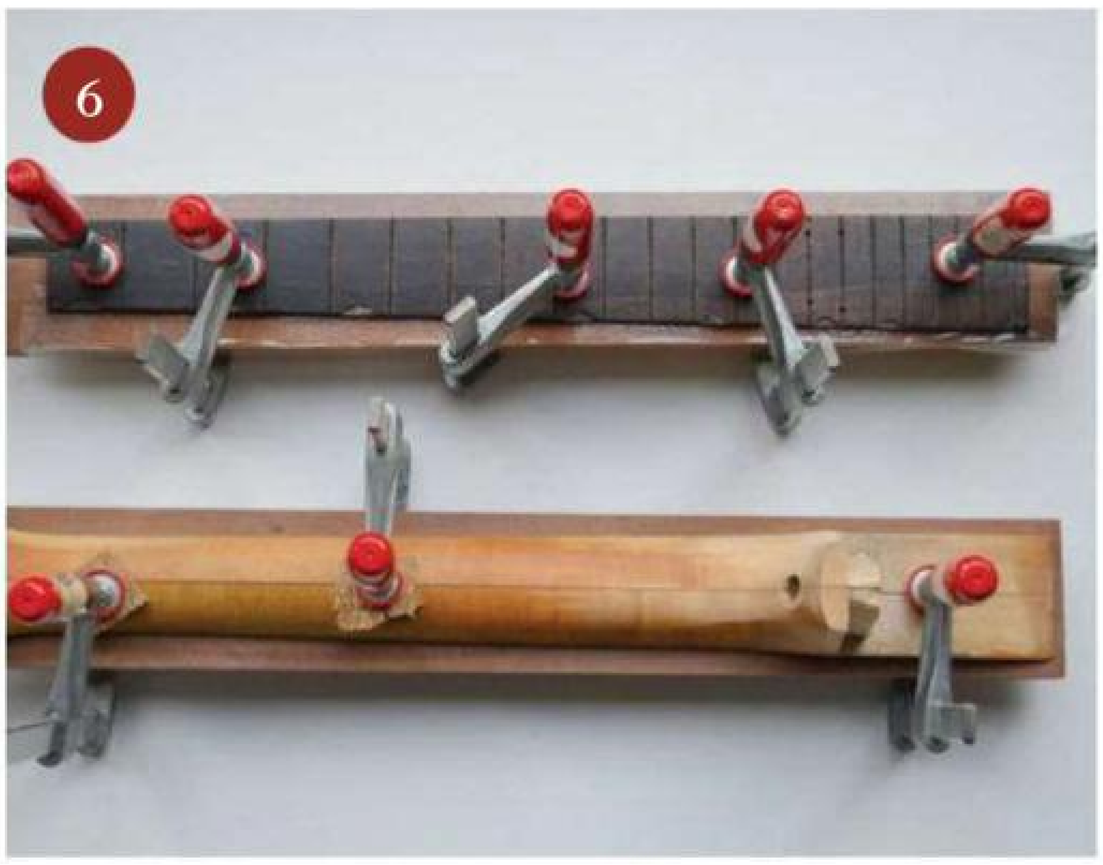
After about 30 minutes, the fingerboard was off and I hadn't done any damage to the board or the neck. As I was working the iron along the neck, I used the heating-up time to remove the frets from the lifted areas of the fretboard. It's always best to heat frets before removal to melt any glue that might be in the slots.

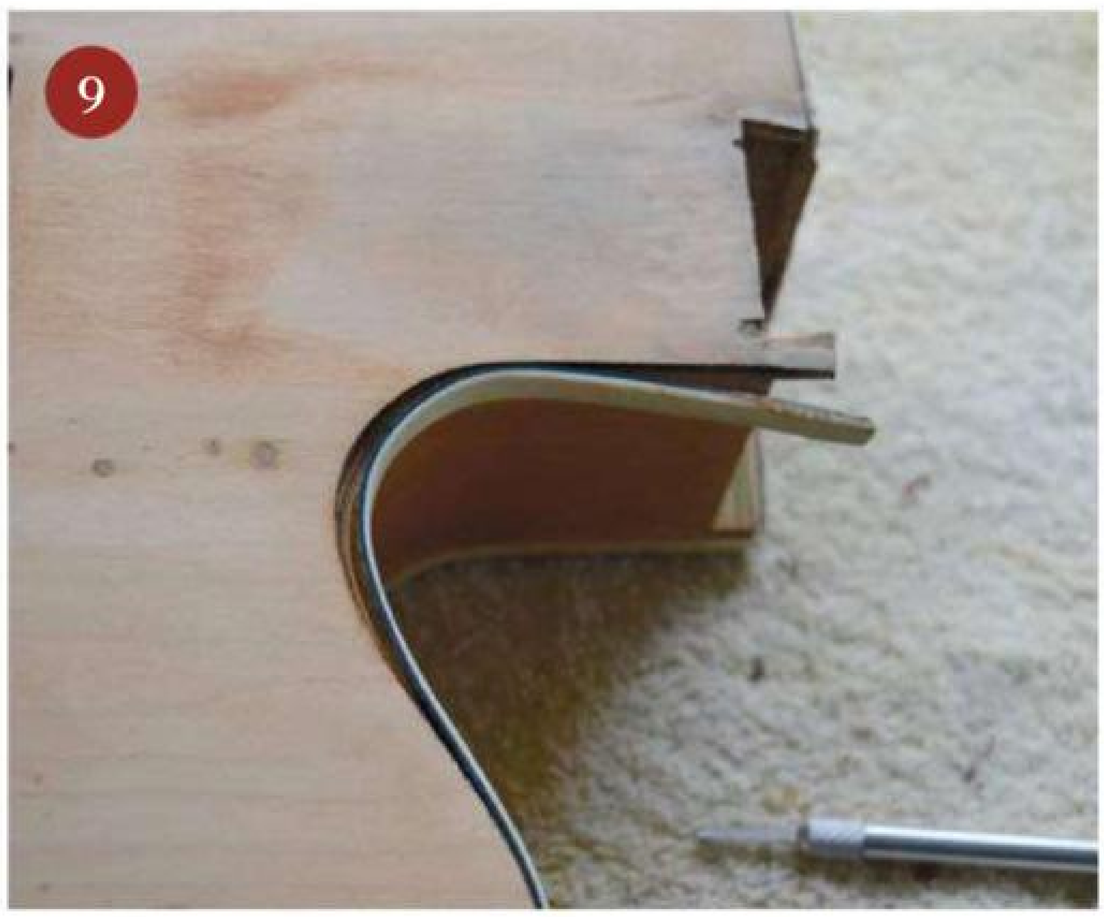
The iron had caused quite a lot of the glue in the slots to boil and squirt out, so the frets pulled up very easily. As soon as the board was off, I clamped it and the neck onto flat planks that I had covered with plastic tape. My hope was to keep them as flat as possible while they cooled down, and the plastic was used to prevent any soft glue from sticking to the planks 6.

Clean up

Later in the day, I used a Stanley knife scraper to clean up the back of the fretboard and the top of the >

5 A hot knife will slide under the fretboard, but resist the temptation to prise the board upwards, because you might end up snapping it. The heat has made the old repair patches bubble up and glue has boiled out from the fret slots





6 As soon as the fretboard and neck separate, clamp them onto dead-straight planks to prevent warping as they cool down. Covering the planks with plastic ensures they won't get stuck together

7 Once the neck and fretboard have cooled down, you can scrape off the old glue. This fretboard is a lovely piece of rosewood, so hopefully we can restore it

8 You can see the truss-rod anchor adjacent to the neck extension joint. The four holes are the ones that we drilled to inject steam into the dovetail joint

9 The original binding was in good condition, with no rot or shrinkage gaps. This is where we started taking it off the body

neck. The idea is to remove the glue residue while removing as little wood as possible.

Scraping the glue off the board revealed some beautiful grain, and my guess would be that it's very old-growth South American rosewood **7**. This reinforced my determination to restore and re-use the fretboard. It was also interesting to see the truss-rod anchor and the walnut strip glued into the truss-rod channel **8**.

With the glue cleaned off, I clamped the neck and fretboard back onto the planks to hold everything steady while I shifted attention to the body.

Binding removal

Yes, more heat and more sharp things, but everything went smoothly and quickly. This time, I used a hairdryer as a heat source, applying the heat to about 10cm at any one time. Gretsch used hide glue to fix the binding, so heating it up through a thin strip of plastic was very easy.

The delicate part is prising the binding away from the binding channel, and I used a small chisel attachment on a craft knife to get started. Before long, I swapped over to a narrow flat-head screwdriver – the type used for electrical work. The blade was narrower than the binding, and the trick to avoid damaging the wood is to twist the screwdriver blade gently back and forth to prise the binding away while keeping the blade well away from the edges. If you hear wood fibres breaking, stop immediately and apply more heat **9**.

With one join at the tail block, I set myself the challenge of getting both pieces of binding off intact. I'm pretty chuffed to say I managed to do exactly that, which means I may have the option of re-using the original binding when I'm reassembling the body **10**.

I was very surprised how cleanly the binding came out. There was some glue residue on the binding, but none was left in the routed binding channel on the body **11**. The hardest bits to remove were the areas inside the curves of the waist and the cutaway, but using more heat, gentle prising and applying some patience seemed to work pretty well.

Making the mould

I once popped the top on an old Washburn parlour guitar, and when I came to replace it I found that the sides had flared outwards. This slightly complicated matters, so I decided to try to avoid having the same thing happen with this guitar.

I used an 18mm-thick backing board measuring 50x60cm and cut

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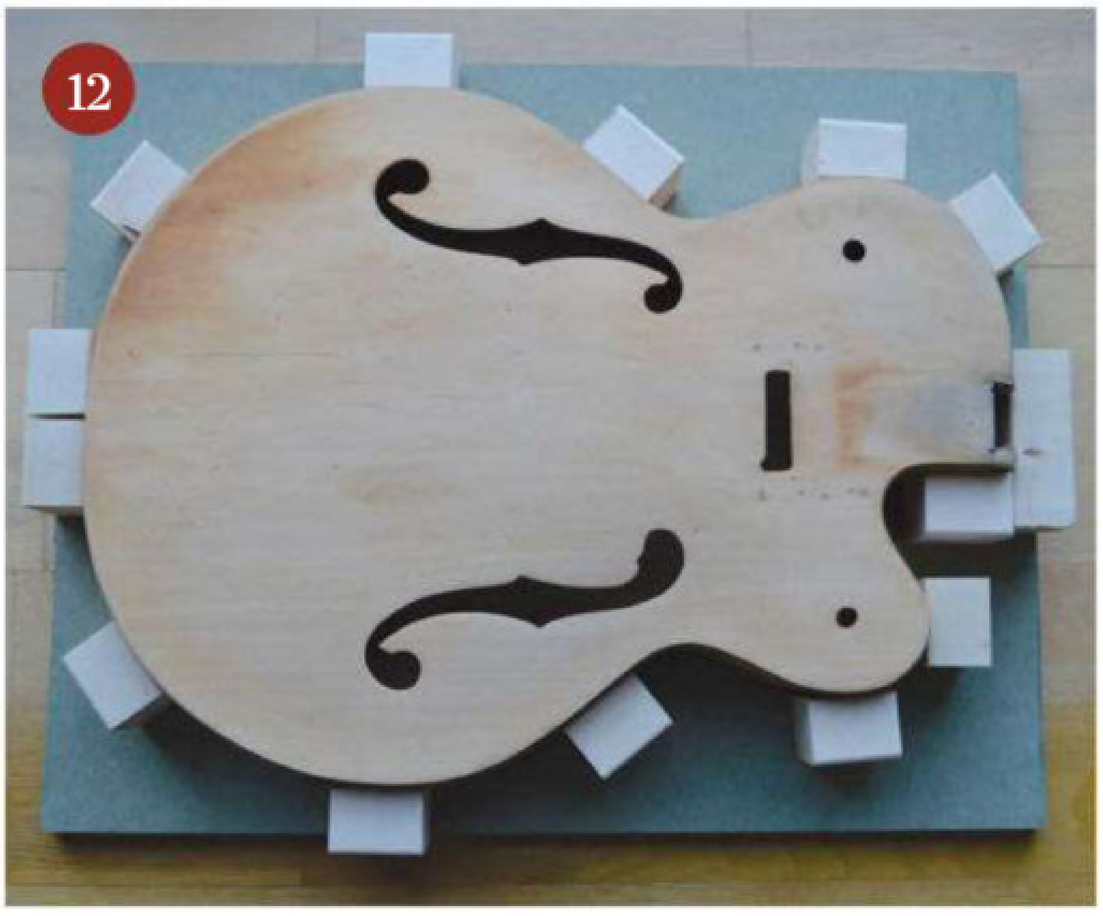

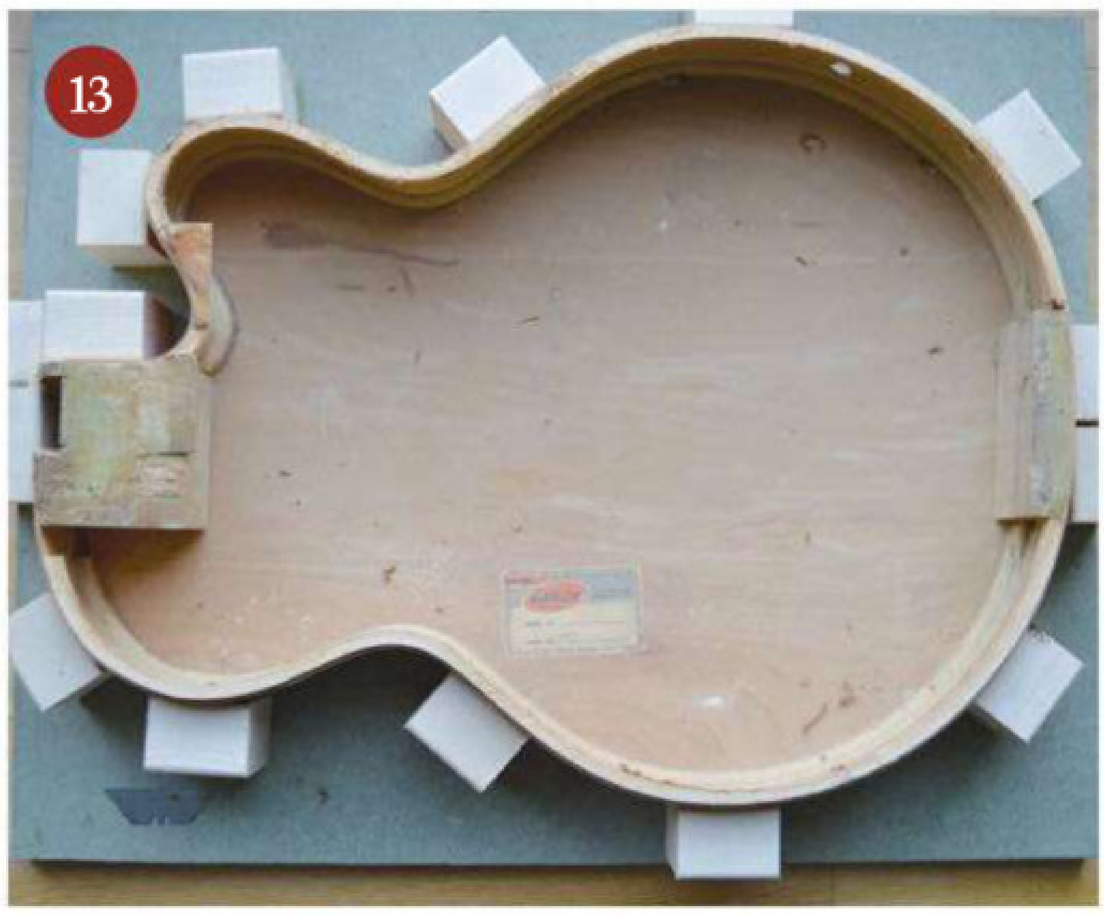

out several blocks of wood from a pre-planed 3.5x6cm piece of timber. I glued and clamped two blocks square to the rear edge of board with a small gap between them for the strap button thread. I followed this up with a second block at the neck end of the body, gluing and clamping only I after I had ensured the front and back edges of the body were square to the blocks.

With the body sandwiched between the blocks, I worked my way around, butting more blocks tight against the sides and gluing them in position. Once the glue had set overnight, I removed the clamps and the body was held firmly in position. I also made pencil marks on the body and the block so that I could re-align the body if, later on in the process, I needed to remove it from the mould 12.

Although this, in theory, should prevent the sides from spreading outwards with the top removed, there's nothing to stop them squeezing inwards. If they do, I'll just have to figure out another solution for that.

Popping the top

Before proceeding with the top removal, I drilled two very small pilot holes through the top – one each at the neck and tail blocks. I'm guessing that it might be tricky to line everything up when it's time to glue the top back on, so a pin through each hole should ensure that at least the front and back ends finish up in the right place.

Fortunately, the top was held on with hide glue, so I used the same method to remove it as I did when separating the fingerboard from the neck. However, this time I set the iron to the lowest heat, for synthetics rather than linen, and protected the top with an old tea towel. My main concern was to avoid separation of the ply layers that formed the top plate, so I left the iron on the body for only a couple of minutes at a time.

However, I did make sure that my putty knife was very hot as I slipped it into the seam between the top and the kerfing. As always, you must try to avoid forcing anything. If the iron has done its job and the knife is hot enough, it will slide right in. As soon as it stops, you should stop too and re-apply the iron while heating up the putty knife.

Some parts will go easier than others, and don't forget that the gluing surface area is far greater at the tail and neck blocks. The neck block is particularly massive, so the knife will need to slide some way in. I also found the treble side brace protruded all the way through the kerfing, so this area took a bit more

10 With one join at the tail block, both strips of binding came off intact. Both could be reattached

11 The binding channel was clean and glue-free. Hardly any clean-up will be required before re-binding the body

12 A scrap board of 18mm MDF and some pine blocks were used to make a mould to stabilise the sides. The mould also came in useful while the top was being removed

13 And we're off. The top came off fairly cleanly, and after the glue residue has been removed the sides will be ready for reassembly

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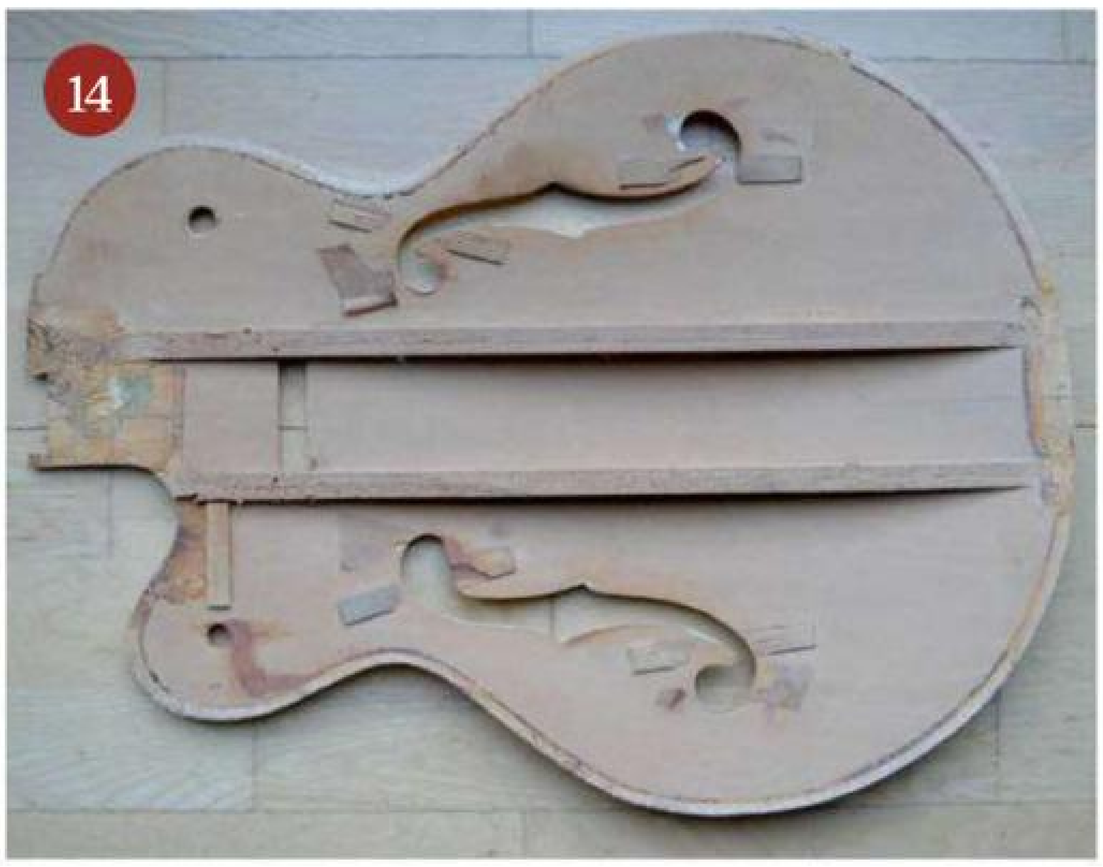

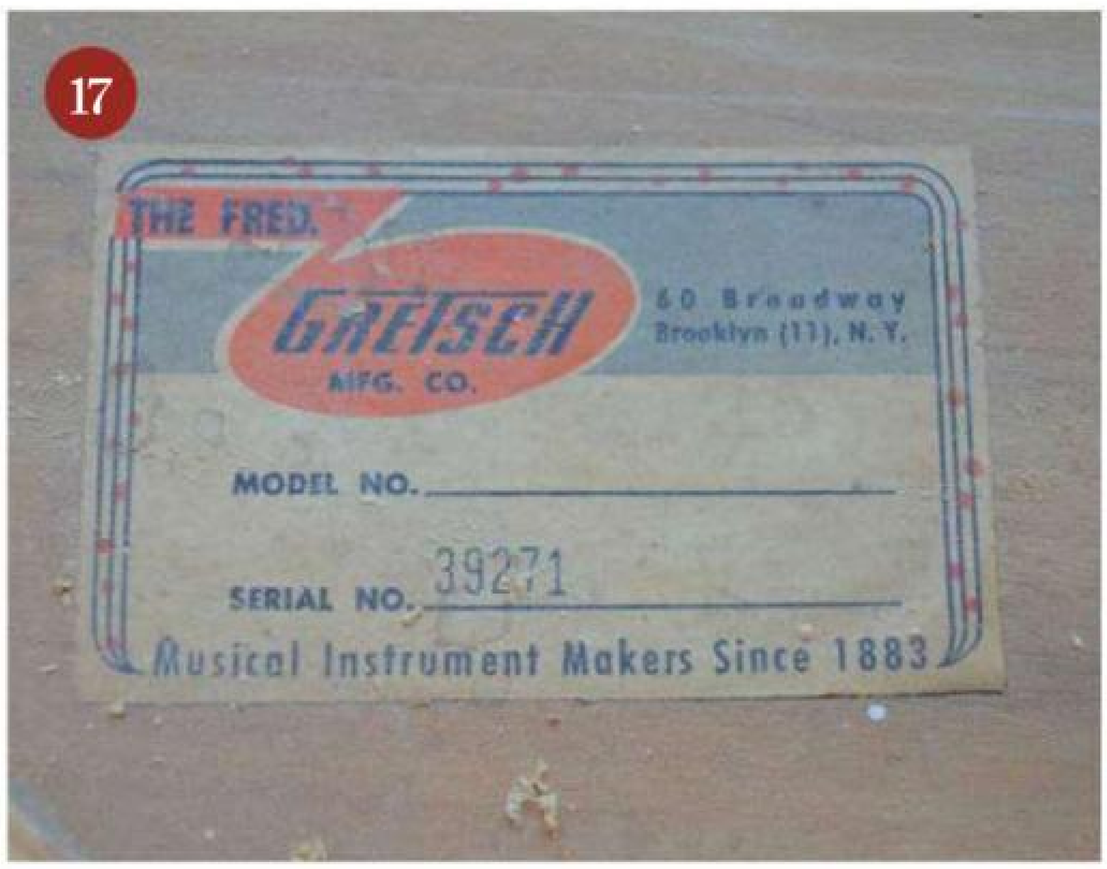

14 The braces on vintage Gretsch tops extended over the body edge in the cutaway and over the neck block

15 You can see Gretsch's solid linings around the cutaway, along with a spacer patch. The neck block will need a clean-up and the locator pin hole drilled adjacent to the dovetail will eventually be hidden by the fretboard extension

16 The remains of the wood scraps and paper the Gretsch factory workers glued across the inside of the f-holes to prevent sprayed lacquer getting inside the body. Once the finishing process was complete, the 'popsicle sticks' could be snapped off and removed from the body cavity

17 The logo is in great shape and the serial number clearly visible. The model number stamp is 6125, which is correct for a single Anniversary, but it is very faded, barely readable and doesn't show up in photographs

work to free off. The whole top removal took about 40 minutes **13**.

A glimpse inside

When the top did eventually come away, I checked for damage but everything looked pretty good. Before re-gluing, I will need to scrape the old glue off the top of the linings and from the underside of the top's edges. The ends of both braces will need to be re-glued, too.

Removing the top provides a great opportunity to discover how the Gretsch factory did certain things. For instance, rather than using traditional segmented kerfing, Gretsch used solid linings that it must have bent to match the curves of the body **14** & **15**.

There are also some interesting chunks of wood and scraps of paper glued to the underside around the f-holes. One of the things Gretsch would have wanted to avoid was finish blowing through the f-holes and into the body cavity when spraying guitars. It seems that thin scraps of wood, much like popsicle sticks, were glued across the f-holes and paper was glued onto the back of the sticks **16**.

The paper would have acted as a barrier to the lacquer, and gluing it on the back of the popsicle sticks ensured there was a gap between the paper and the f-holes. This would have prevented the lacquer from pooling up on the paper. Presumably, the factory would have punched through the popsicle sticks and snapped them off once the lacquer had dried. The scrap pieces of wood and paper would then have been fished out. It's also nice to be able to get a good look at the logo for the first time **17**.

So, with the disassembly complete, it's time to start the restoration and conversion work. Check in next time as attention shifts back to the neck.

NEXT MONTH...

Huw Price takes a break from the Gretsch project and shows you how to build a simple attenuator with bypass and frequency compensation switching

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TALKING 'SHOP

SPREADING THE WORD

Mark Bailey has learned from the best about what it takes to build a quality guitar. As he explains to **MARK ALEXANDER**, he now spends most of his time passing on that wisdom

Above **Mark Bailey with one of his stunning acoustic guitars**

Opposite page (left to right) **A neck-through electric custom design; a sunburst acoustic; a Bailey archtop**

Those who can, according to Mark Bailey, teach. From his workshop in Ayrshire, the softly spoken luthier goes quietly about his business, listening to a dust-covered radio that pumps out a reassuring soundtrack. From here, he produces elegant electric, acoustic and archtop instruments fashioned from exotic woods. Each one is built to his exacting standards and is completed with care and precision.

Like many guitar makers, the 44-year-old honed his skills through hard work and a process of osmosis, collaborating with the likes of Patrick Eggle and Trevor Wilkinson. Eighteen years later, and after creating his own brand of handcrafted British instruments, Bailey has etched his name into the world of guitar construction, underlining his pedigree with a signature model for the trailblazing percussion guitarist Preston Reed.

Bailey's quiet resolve may be a contributing factor to his longevity, but what might surprise you is this talented craftsman happily opens his doors to his earthy workshop, inviting the likes of you and I in to build our own dream guitars using his tools. This is a sorcerer's lair where anyone can join in.

Bailey's willingness to help others design and build their own guitars from scratch is not only refreshing, it is also the basis for a unique business. "I don't like holding back, I don't like keeping things secret," he says. "There is enough space for everybody. If someone comes on my course and in five days goes away and starts their own guitar business, then fair play to them. If they're that good, they deserve it." >

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Bailey

Bailey produces a range of guitars, including electrics, which can be built in a week

Wood selection and matching is a crucial part of the job

Although Bailey's candour may have endeared him to more than 400 students, it hasn't always gone down well with his contemporaries. This is, after all, the shadowy world of guitar making. "It doesn't impress them all," he says. "But the best guitar players don't try to hide their secrets – they show you how they do it." So why shouldn't he?

Eggle's influence

Bailey started dispensing his knowledge of wood and strings shortly after being made redundant from the Patrick Eggle factory in Coventry during the early 90s. It was a job he had fought hard to secure and revelled in during his four years there. The opportunity had arisen at one of those sparkling moments when fate intervenes just in the nick of time. Eggle had hit a rich vein of form, with his exquisite designs making their way into music shops up and down the country. To cope with demand, the company opened the Coventry factory, with the legendary luthier in charge of production.

Bailey was 18 and had gone through a number of jobs, hating every one of them. He was young and had limited career options; all he knew was he loved wood and guitars. That's when he had an epiphany. After offering to work for free at a local guitar shop, Bailey took the shopkeeper's advice and enquired at a local factory, where a guitar company had set up shop.

"He gave me a shiny brochure with beautiful flame-quilted guitars on the cover," says Bailey. "Patrick had just moved to Coventry and I went and knocked on the door, but they said they didn't have any jobs. After persisting, they eventually let me in. Sweeping the floor was my first job, but I was so keen; I loved it. I worked as fast as I could just to get onto the next job. I worked in every department, but my main job was carving the necks."

Working with the likes of Eggle, Wilkinson and the company's technical director Rob Williams, Bailey absorbed crucial knowledge from some of the UK's most respected luthiers. Nearly 20 years after his apprenticeship, it's clear he still looks back fondly on his time at Eggle. "To work one-on-one with these guys was incredible," he says. "I stay in touch with Patrick – he makes some of the best guitars in the UK. I was very lucky to work at the factory. I saw how it was done. I learned there were no difficult jobs; just 50 or 60 simple jobs that anybody could do. What I learned was how to break down the process of building a guitar into lots of simple jobs, and that's what I love passing on to other people."

Career change

Bailey describes his move into teaching as a happy accident following his departure from the factory and a year of travelling with his partner Carol. On their return, and after much soul searching, they decided to do what they do best. "Carol ran training courses, so she knew how to organise that side of things, and I knew how to build guitars. So we had this idea of >

THE BAILEY RANGE

Bailey builds an eclectic mix of electrics, acoustics, archtops, signature models and a range of special guitars that include folk and jazz instruments. He also creates custom guitars which require a dedicated design session to agree the look and feel of the guitar as well as the spec. He says: "I have 12 guitars in the workshop to cover my range – I have to have something to show people when they come to the workshop. So if I have a really nice piece of wood, I'll make a guitar myself as a showpiece. The pieces of wood tell me what they want to be. Every piece has a destiny as part of the guitar, so if I see a bit of wood, I know what it's going to be."

There are three guitars in Bailey's electric range. The Exotica is his "ultimate" electric with a thru-neck design, exotic wood and top-quality parts. The Curve is his most versatile guitar and the first Bailey model he designed, while his Bandsman, with a set neck, two humbuckers and fixed bridge, is what his students try to reproduce. "You've got to start somewhere and most people would make a bolt-on guitar with a parallel headstock," he says. "A step up would be a set neck and then a through-neck. So I've gone for the middle ground to make a high-quality guitar as simply as possible but which is a little different to what everyone else is doing."

Stormbags

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Right- and left-handed electrics from Bailey's range

running a guitar-building course. Originally, the idea was to raise money to build a recording studio in a double-decker bus."

The bus became his workshop, and by 1999 Bailey had designed and built a number of one-off guitars. It was time to step it up, which he proceeded to do in style with his first production guitar, his first build-your-own guitar course and his first guitar show at the Birmingham NEC, which proved pivotal. Setting up opposite jazz guitarist Martin Taylor, good fortune once again shone on the aspiring luthier. "Martin invited me to the Kirkmichael International Guitar Festival in Scotland as a guitar doctor," he says recounting his introduction to an event he has attended many times. "On the third year, I built a guitar in a tent completely from scratch. It was tricky because I wasn't allowed to make any noise while the performers were on stage."

It was down to the Australian fingerpicker Tommy Emmanuel to put the completed guitar through its paces, theatrically, live on stage. "I had only glued the neck on that morning, set up the guitar in the afternoon and he did all this stuff when he bends the neck," says Bailey. "There were 1,000 people holding their breath because they had all seen it getting made. I don't think anyone had done that before – build a guitar at a festival. I've done it twice since then."

Following its very public baptism of fire, the quick-build festival guitar was duly won by a lucky audience member after Emmanuel drew out a winning raffle ticket. It was a decisive moment, not only for the guitar's new owner but also for Bailey who eventually relocated to the festival's locale on the west coast of Scotland.

Life-changing moment

While the festival stunt raised his profile, it wouldn't be the last time Bailey's guitar-building exploits would define someone's life. "I literally saw him turn into a man in front of my eyes," he says describing the impact his luthier's course had on one of his students.

"He was a scared 17-year-old and I literally saw it happen," he says, "he became more confident. People become more confident when they do something their mates said they wouldn't do. They all think they're going to be the one that makes the mistake and ruins their guitar, but I don't let that happen. Four hundred people have done the course and nobody fails. Everybody leaves with what they think is the best guitar in the world."

Bailey's guitar-building course is an intensive five-day >

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Above left **Bailey selecting the most desirable tone woods**
Above right **The Ayrshire workshop is full of traditional tools, such as this miniature wood planer Bailey uses for creating archtops**

programme during which a class of four students will learn about the materials and tools needed to make a fully working, six-string electric, which they take home with them. With options for customising their axe with different woods, finishes and pickups, the syllabus is demanding and often has far-reaching consequences.

"It changes people's lives," he says. "We never intend it to happen, but the most drastic was when one student went back and left his wife. People get trapped and when they come here, they get their eyes opened. They can do something different. They can do something so amazing that when they go back they can do more amazing things. Some leave their jobs and start their own businesses. Building a guitar is quite an intense experience."

Looking forward

Although his workshop is adorned with rustic, wood-handled chisels, Bailey enjoys dabbling in the possibilities offered by modern technology – he has launched an online academy, and there is a virtual guitar-design programme on www.baileyguitars.co.uk that can eat dangerously into your free time. It's not overly surprising, then, when asked about guitars of the future that Bailey's predictions eagerly embrace change – but with a fail-safe caveat.

"In the future, they'll ban wood and print guitars," he claims boldly. "I think technology will improve so much that you'll be able to print species of wood – so you'll print out a mahogany guitar with an ebony fretboard, for instance. All you'll have to do is print out the cellular structure. Of course, you'll still need a guitar maker to put it together and make it work, and that's where I come in."

THE HIT MAKER

Mark Bailey designed his first signature instrument for the influential and pioneering percussive guitarist Preston Reed. The resulting large-body baritone, made from mahogany and cedar with a mahogany neck with rosewood fretboard, produces deep piano-like sounds from the strings and faithful drum sounds from the body. It is many instruments in one.

"Preston has a unique style that he pretty much invented and has really taken off – everyone is hitting their guitars today," says Bailey. "He played Ovation for a long time and basically wore it out. Things have changed over at Ovation and he needed a baritone. I met him at a festival and, like everyone else, he told me what he wanted, but unlike most people he knew exactly what he wanted. Most people have a reasonable idea, but Preston knew exactly what he wanted. So we started with a blank piece of paper and drew it out."

He continues: "I've made three guitars for Preston. The original baritone was mahogany and cedar, which I think of as a prototype. We've moved on and it has evolved. Preston has gone through every type of pickup imaginable, and finally we found a combination that really worked well together for what he does. He's only just got that; the last time I spoke to him he had done four gigs with it."

With a very special heather gem around the body binding and on the headstock, the latest Preston Reed signature model isn't cheap at £8,000, but it is rather beautiful. "It is my most expensive guitar, so we're not expecting to make hundreds of them," admits Bailey. "It's a really nice guitar. A lot of work goes into it."

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GIBSON MEMPHIS 1958 ES-335 VOS £3,399
ELECTRIC GUITAR

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Guitar World AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Gibson Memphis 1958 ES-335 VOS

1958 was also the year of the sunburst Les Paul, the Flying V and the Explorer, but Gibson's thinline archtop was arguably the greater achievement. **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** winds back the clock...

It's hard to imagine now, but in 1958 the jury was still out on the new-fangled solidbody electric guitars of the age. The benefits of the Telecaster, Les Paul and Stratocaster were, of course, many but that didn't stop plenty of players yearning for something physically closer to the jazzboxes with which they felt at home.

Applying the company's archtop heritage to the new demand for electric guitars that were more controllable at higher volumes, Gibson's then-president Ted McCarty "came up with the idea of putting a solid block of maple in an acoustic model. It would get some of the same tone as a regular solidbody, plus the instrument's hollow wings would vibrate and we'd get a combination of an electric solidbody and a hollowbody."

Of course, this principle wasn't a million miles away from Les Paul's Log prototype that Gibson rejected shortly before America entered World War II. Yet rather than starting with a solid centre-block and adding hollow wings to make the instrument look and feel more like a guitar, McCarty inserted the centre-block into a 16-inch thinline archtop. In addition to its feedback-reducing properties, this hybrid design would deliver an even balance, light overall weight and a comfortable seated playing experience, addressing the concerns of many late-50s Gibson customers, for whom the compact and heavy Les Paul Model was still something of a white elephant.

When it entered production in April 1958, the revolutionary ES-335 benefited from the technological advances that had recently been applied to the Les Paul, in the shape of PAF humbucking pickups, a tune-o-matic bridge and stop tailpiece. Most sources agree that 317 of Gibson's new thinline semis left the factory that year – 267 in sunburst (ES-335TD) and 50 natural (ES-335TDN), marketed at $267.50 and $282.50 respectively. It's the earliest of these models that the 2016 1958 ES-335 VOS is intended to replicate.

An original natural '58 model with an unbound board is as rare as a hen with a Hollywood smile astride a unicorn

It's not known exactly when Gibson switched over to bound fingerboards on the ES-335 but the evidence points to late 1958. Given the small numbers involved, this makes an original natural '58 model with an unbound board as rare as a hen with a Hollywood smile astride a unicorn. Unobtainable they may be, but we've always loved the aesthetic combination of long 'guard, natural finish and unbound board, so when Gibson Memphis announced this guitar as part of its 2016 line we greeted the news with the kind of mixed >

The fat neck shape and unbound 'board feel like a late 50s LP Junior

KEY FEATURES

Gibson Memphis 1958 ES-335 VOS

- **PRICE** £3,399
- **DESCRIPTION** Thinline semi-hollow electric, made in the USA
- **BUILD** Three-ply maple/poplar/maple top, back and rims, maple centreblock, spruce braces. Mahogany set neck with 'Traditional C' profile, 12" radius rosewood fingerboard with pearloid dot inlays and 22 0.100"x 0.045" frets, nylon nut
- **HARDWARE** VOS nickel-plated No-wire ABR-1 bridge and lightweight aluminium stop tailpiece, Kluson tuners with plastic tulip buttons, VOS white plastic strap buttons
- **ELECTRICS** 2x MHS humbuckers (alnico III 7.5k rhythm and alnico II 7.9k treble) with VOS nickel-plated covers, 2x volume and 2x tone controls, Bumblebee .022mfd/200v capacitors, 3-way pickup selector switch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 24.75"/628.6mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 50mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 22.8mm at first fret, 25.4mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 34mm at nut, 52mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 7.7lbs/3.4kg
- **FINISHES** 58 Natural VOS nitrocellulose (as reviewed) and 58 Burst
- **CONTACT** Gibson **www.gibson.com**

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GIBSON MEMPHIS 1958 ES-335 VOS £3,399

ELECTRIC GUITAR

Both the top and back have a subtle figure that shimmers under lights

Stamped steel Klusons with plastic tulip buttons adorn the peghead

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The 2016 line from **Gibson Memphis** also includes the **1959 ES-335TD £4,799**, but that seems like a hell of an upcharge for neck binding! The **Collings I-35 LC £3,699** is perhaps the ultimate boutique take on Gibson's groundbreaking thinline semi, with Bill Collings finding inspiration in the tone and dynamics of David Grissom's original 1959 ES-335. At the other end of the price spectrum, **Epiphone**'s **Dot £329** is a great first step on the thinline ladder.

feelings all guitarists will recognise: about 50 per cent lustful swooning and 50 per cent, "Oh bloody hell, why did they have to go and do that to me?"

Doing our best to put emotion to one side, let's first address what this isn't, and that's a True Historic-style attempt to manufacture an instrument that's as close as is legal to the guitars that left the Kalamazoo factory back in '58. Neither is it an attempt to create a painstaking replica that will fool your audience into thinking it's a vintage piece; despite the manufacturer's description referring to this as an "accurate rendition of the original dot neck", the reality is more pragmatic.

For example, the shallow neck angle typical of 1958 ES-335s was such that Gibson was forced to use a low-profile ABR-1 in order to deliver a comfortable playing action. Sadly, the thinner bridges weren't strong enough to cope with the tension of the larger string gauges of the time and were prone to failure. Common sense prevails in 2016, so there's a regular neck angle of four degrees, a standard ABR-1 with no retaining wire and a marvelously slinky playing action as a result.

It's not just the action that's player-friendly; the 'Traditional C' neck shape offers a full inch of depth at the 12th fret but fills the palm wonderfully and never feels excessively chunky or fatiguing. Thanks to the absence of binding and the reddish-brown hue of the aniline dye powder that's mixed in with the grain filler and applied to the neck, in terms of both look and feel you could easily be fooled by your left hand into thinking you are playing a Les Paul Junior. There's something very rock 'n' roll about the stripped-down, student guitar feel and we can't get enough of it.

For your right hand, there's a more familiar ride. Though Gibson built original '58s using a thinner, three-ply maple laminate that was prone to splitting, and then moved to four-ply in '59, today in Memphis the company uses a three-ply maple/poplar/maple configuration. Like the shape of the pickup covers, it's a detail that might annoy one or two inhabitants of vintage guitar forums but back in the real world, we're too busy playing the thing to worry about that.

And what a great player this guitar is. For our money, this is as close to physically perfect as the electric guitar experience gets – the light figure in the top layer of the body laminates shimmers deliciously as it moves under lights and, despite the chunky neck and light overall weight, strapped-on balance couldn't be better. Knocking on for six decades after its inception, it's easy to see why so many guitarists still consider the ES-335 to be the greatest electric guitar design of them all.

In use

Time to plug in then, and the control here is provided by this writer's own Nashville-made 2003 ES-335 with excellent-sounding vintage-voiced Mojo Pickups PAF replicas, paper-in-oil capacitors and 1950s-style wiring. Yet, sadly for our faithful old workhorse, just as the Memphis model's acoustic projection and sustain far exceeds that of our own guitar, when we switch over to the Memphis model in an electric context it's as if somebody has stepped on a full-range boost pedal.

Everything is bigger and more widescreen, the bass response is much improved and our tweed-style amplifier is pushed into overdrive much more quickly with the guitar's volume controls wide open. Proof that the Memphis model's 'slightly underwound' MHS (Memphis Historic Spec) pickups are no slouches when it comes to output and that 'underwound' doesn't necessarily mean underpowered? You bet.

As has been noted in these pages before, there's much more to the amplified voice of an electric guitar than the DC resistance of its pickups, and you should never think of the figure in kilo-ohms as simply an 'output power' rating. Listening hard in a clean context with the volume levels equalised, the handwound Mojo 'buckers in our own instrument seem to deliver a little more harmonic complexity, but the MHS pickups – also unpotted with unbalanced coils – in combination with the more resonant Memphis guitar add up to a better overall sound with greater depth of tone in the bass and an airy, chiming high end.

It's not an issue with a cranked tweed amp alone, but when you start bringing stacked overdrive and boost pedals into play at volume, the MHS pickups are more susceptible to microphonic squeal than our Mojo units; you may find this problematic if you play loud rock on small stages. That said, if you can get a bit of separation between yourself and the amplifier then there are some tasty heavy drive tones to be had too.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Does everything a good old ES-335 should, from jangle to 'woman' tones
+ Captures the spirit of an original '58
+ Fabulous neck, perfect balance, problem-free build

- Microphonic squeal at high gain levels

This was love at first sight but happily it sounds and feels as good as it looks. Gibson's Memphis factory is on a roll...

9/10

"I can say this - my bass has never sounded this good.....
The amps are beautiful and sounding better every night as they burn in. Amazing tonal variety - whisper to a scream with a button or two. Like thick, hot tarmac. Blends with everything really well. Everyone loves it - most of all ME!!"

Michael Rhodes
Joe Bonamassa

Ashdown Engineering

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Fender American Elite Series Stratocaster, Stratocaster HSS Shawbucker & Telecaster

The new Elite Series guitars feature redesigned pickups, compound neck profiles and refined body contours. Are these the best production Fenders ever? **SIMON BRADLEY** finds out

Modern companies need to grow and evolve in order to remain not only current, but solvent too. Imagine, then, being part of the never-ending search for new and improved versions of what are widely regarded as perfect designs – Leo Fender's Stratocaster and Telecaster. Needless to say, the crop of designers and tinkerers who are currently plying their trade at Fender MIC rarely fail to come up with an innovation or two that are subsequently incorporated in new instruments – but it can't be an easy task.

Mere production models tend to be outshone by the sumptuous morsels issued by Fender's Custom Shop facility, and while we're certainly not averse to the wonders of a Masterbuilt Heavy Relic Strat, instruments hailing from the regular production line in Corona continue to deserve attention. We consider guitars from both the American Standard and Vintage series to be as good as ever and, what's more, a few minutes spent searching online can unearth some incredible deals for what are pro-standard instruments.

However, after spending a couple of weeks in the company of these Elites, we're struggling to think of an instance where a similarly extensive crop of what Fender calls high-performance enhancements has been corralled into a single series. Fender, for its part, regards the Elites as the very pinnacle of its current production line – which is no small statement.

Fender regards the Elites as the very pinnacle of its current production line – which is no small statement

The range comprises the Stratocaster, Stratocaster HSS Shawbucker and Telecaster, examples of which we have here, plus the Thinline Tele, a limited edition Strat in two-colour sunburst and a left-handed version of the Strat. It's a little deflating to note that bass players have been overlooked, at least for now, but we can't help thinking that there must be plans for an Elite Precision or Jazz secreted somewhere at Fender HQ.

Many of the new features we'll be describing are common to all models, but we'd agree with Fender that top of the list of refinements are the Elites' single-coil pickups. They're 4th Generation Noiseless units and Fender has, in a nutshell, aimed for keeping the classic single-coil feel and tone whilst

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Fender's new noiseless pickup design is the company's best yet

The Mystic Black Tele, reflective flakes within its finish twinkling subtly under lights like a blanket of star-strewn black velvet, is truly out of this world

removing any pesky noise. "We're always chasing that perfect combo of a classic Fender sound with no hum," says Fender's Justin Norvell. "We believe our Noiseless pickups are the best out there, but we also felt that we could make them even better, so we're always playing with the formula. Also, rather than comparing them to and voicing them from the past three generations of Noiseless pickups, we used our American Vintage series pickups and voiced a more classic tone." (Justin's referring to 60s style as a base for the 4th Gen Strat pickups and the '52 style for the Tele – Ed).

"The 4th Generation pickups are an entirely new design," Norvell continues. "We spent two years in development and produced dozens of versions to get it right. There's a bit of a secret to the formula, but we used separate pole magnet sets in the coils and then experimented with different wire gauges between the coils and different gauss strengths in the magnets until we achieved the optimal combination. They're all-new; new bobbins, magnets, everything.

"We also made sure to voice them to be musical and smooth with high gain. We joke that these are cold fusion pickups, that we've finally cracked what people have been trying to do for 50 years."

S-1 switching

In addition, the Elites include the innovative S-1 switching system, which allows you to combine the pickups in all sorts of different ways, yielding contrasting sounds. Switched in and out via a push/push indent built into the volume knob of each guitar, we'll describe some of the resulting sounds in due course.

Fender has produced more humbuckers than you may have assumed over the years, including the classic Wide Range and, more recently, the ultra-powerful Enforcer, the latter based around ceramic 8 magnets and capable of seismically leveling buildings. You can take your pick from the Twin Head and Diamondback 'buckers too, but Fender has loaded the bridge position of the Elite HSS Strat with a Shawbucker – a PAF-a-like designed by lauded pickup veteran Tim Shaw.

The HSS Strat also features a Passing Lane button that nestles between the duo of tone pots. First introduced in 2010 on the US Deluxe HSS Strat, this, like Yamaha's Pure Direct button – as fitted to the RGX420DZ rocker – or John Suhr's Blower switch, gives a shortcut straight to the bridge pickup, regardless of how any of the other selectors may be set. In doing so, it bypasses all controls to give as pure a signal as practical.

All Strat controls are topped with soft-touch knobs, so called due to a strip of soft rubber set around the cylindrical section intended to provide extra grip when pulling off the most minimal of level adjustments. No such lily-livered tomfoolery for the Tele, however: its pair of knurled flat-top knobs remain traditional in design.

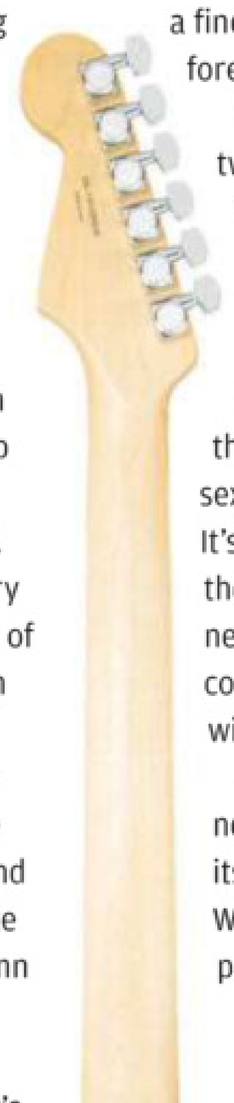
In amongst the impressive selection of finishes available across the range are two brand new hues exclusive to the Elite Series. These comprise Autumn Blaze Metallic, which, to our eyes, is somewhere between Arizona Sun and Johnny Marr's Metallic KO in shade, and is available across all models, and Sky Burst Metallic, which is restricted to the Strats. And before Tele players begin composing tear-stained missives to Fender in protest, the classic singlecut has two colours all of its own, namely Butterscotch Blonde and, for the Thinline, Mystic Ice Blue. Up-close, the finishing of our three examples is flawless and, while we love the appearance of both Strats, the Mystic Black Tele, reflective flakes within its finish twinkling subtly under lights like a blanket of star-strewn black velvet, is truly out of this world.

The bodies of both the Strats and Teles are constructed from either alder or ash, with the latter being available with just the transparent finishes, and the vast majority of all permutations can be fitted with either a rosewood or maple 'board to the maple necks.

Exceptions include the Butterscotch Tele, which has only maple in its arsenal for that ever-popular '52 vibe, and the choice of Thinlines, which lack the rosewood option altogether. If all this wasn't sufficient, the body contours have also been addressed to now present a finer sculpt on the belly and forearm areas for extra comfort.

The Strats feature Fender's two-point Deluxe Synchronized Tremolo bridge, which includes a pop-in bar and chrome block-style saddles rather than the bent steel options fitted to the US Standard, while the Tele's bridge array features a sextet of chromed brass saddles. It's also worth mentioning that the Elite Thinline includes the new Suspension Bridge, which combines a screwless mounting with three modern brass saddles.

All six Elites feature the same neck – one that has also seen its fair share of refinement. With the needs of the modern player in mind, the neck offers a 241mm-355.6mm/9.5-14-inch compound radius alongside a compound profile that transforms from a modern C-shape at the nut to a flatter D towards the dusty end. The satin urethane finish gives the neck maple a luxuriously smooth feel and all three of the guitars are eminently playable straight out of the box.



LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Fender American Elite Series Stratocaster

The unashamedly **Fender**-y **Music Man Cutlass** **£1,499** offers a customarily lovely neck alongside a trio of custom-wound single coils. **Reverand**'s **Six Gun** **£615** is quirkily cool, while Fender's good old **US Standard Strat**, with a range of classic features and finishes **£1,159** is still great value.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Fender American Elite Series Stratocaster HSS Shawbucker

The US Standard Strat is also available with a **Shawbucker** in the bridge from **£1,159**, while more affordable Fender HSS Strats include the **Deluxe Lone Star**, from **£629**. Elsewhere, check out the **Suhr Classic Pro** around **£1,799** or **LTD's SN-1000W** **£836** for other HSS S-type options

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Fender American Elite Series Telecaster

Fender's **Classic Series '72** Tele Custom in black **£839** is pure Keef and a truly great guitar while, for extra tone, try Yamaha's recently revamped **PAC1611MS** Mike Stern signature **£1,276**. Alternatively, the **Fret-King JDD** **£809** is perfect for outrageous bends and zingy twang

If, like us, you prefer meatier strings to the factory-fitted 9-42s, and subsequently find you need to tweak the neck, you'll discover something else that's new: a truss-rod adjustment wheel that nestles just beyond the 22nd fret. This does make fine-tuning the rod tension somewhat easier than gingerly inserting an allen key into a more traditional port situated up behind the nut, or indeed removing the neck. A lovely touch is the wheel's colour too; it's black for a rosewood fingerboard or gold for a maple. OK, so it's a small detail but one that, for us, demonstrates Fender's desire to ensure the Elites are truly special.

Perhaps most drastic of all is the new four-bolt heel design. Again present on both the Strats and Teles, the corner closest to the fingerboard has been rounded off to give more comfortable access to the highest frets. Some players may find the lack of a micro tilt aperture concerning, but the heel merges with the neck maple and fingerboard very nicely indeed and, when you're actually playing, you don't notice anything untoward – which is just as it should be.

The gloss-finished headstocks sport not only a 50s-style spaghetti foil logo and a redesigned string tree but also a set of Fender's new short-post locking tuners, which give an improved break angle over the synthetic bone nut.

In conclusion, before we shut up and play, all of the guitars – including the Teles – feature 22 medium jumbo frets and come snug in a substantial moulded Fender ABS hardcase.

The SSS Strat holds few surprises, which is fine by us. It sounds great, with the S-1 options simply adding more strings to your tonal bow

In use

Upon plugging in, we can at once confirm that there's not even a hint of pickup hum and, as we flick through the settings of the HSS Strat, we're struck by just how natural the tones are. Position two of the five-way combines both humbucker coils with the middle pickup in parallel, which is a good option for rhythm work; and the full humbucker, whilst certainly powerful, demonstrates the ideal combination of depth and high-end spank.

The S-1 system provides a selection of settings in series, with several providing some wonderfully fat tones – especially with higher-gain amp settings. The central position, which combines the HB and middle together in series with the neck in parallel, is super-syrupy and has an ear-catching middly character that can be tempered to taste by the volume pot. Think Billy Gibbons meets Brian May and you'll have an idea of how good this is.

The duration of sustain is impressive too and, for genuinely emotive solos, this may well become a go-to option. Cleanly, we found that position two, which simply removes the neck pickup from this setting, was clearer and therefore more musical but, as ever, we'd advise that you try out everything to see which is best for you. There are certainly a whole lot of tones to savour.

The Shawbucker, too, ticks all the boxes and is to our ears a little more trebly than a classic PAF, which is to be expected. For rock and modern blues, it's rounded and strident, and flicking to the Passing Lane adds more high end and harmonics. Remember that this bypasses all controls, including the volume pot, so you'll need to disengage in order to grab back the reins. We did find that the button was difficult to see from a standing position, though: maybe a location closer to the five-way could have been a consideration?

The SSS Strat holds few unexpected surprises, which is fine by us. In a nutshell, it sounds great, with the S-1 options simply adding more strings to your tonal bow. We'd heartily recommend either position two, which combines the neck and middle in

stormbox!

series with the bridge in parallel, or position five – which gives a huge tone with all three pickups in series.

The Tele, due to its dual single-coil configuration, has only one realistic S-1 setting, switching the middle position's combination of the pickups from parallel to series. This, though, gives the guitar a truly lovely tonal option whenever you need it. In series, the tone thickens exponentially and has an unusual yet wholly usable honk to it, too. Whilst still possessing a modicum of twang, the tone is louder and rounder than, for example, the neck pickup and would be the perfect choice for a soulful bluesy solo.

It can get a little too muddy for chords if you're not careful, but experimenting with the amp gain or switching in a subtle overdrive stompbox does aid the cut-through. Played clean, though, this selection is lovely and complements the perfectly defined twang that's available from the remaining settings.

The short-post tuners aid in the successful performance of Jerry Donahue-style behind-the-nut bends and, needless to say, the pickups are as quiet as the grave as far as hum and extraneous noises are concerned. What's more, the neck dimensions and medium jumbo frets make this Tele extremely comfortable to play and, as much as we love a good '52, we never found ourselves cramped – as we have occasionally when grappling with reissues of originals from that period.

All three guitars play wonderfully well and certainly differ sufficiently from their counterparts in the US Standard ranges to represent a worthwhile addition to your collection, irrespective of how many more of Leo's finest already reside there. They're priced well, and if we had to pick one as our favourite, we'd probably go for the Tele simply because of the quality of tones it offers. That said, the HSS Strat could probably cover just about any gig or session you may have in your diary. Choices, choices...

It can be difficult to see the wood for the trees when you're in the market for a new Strat or Tele, due simply to the sheer breadth of choice that's available today. With the Elites, Fender has made it easy: these might well be the best new models to come from Corona for quite some time, and we can't recommend them highly enough.

KEY FEATURES

Fender American Elite Series Stratocaster

- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody six-string guitar with a gloss polyurethane finish, manufactured in USA
- **PRICE** £1,389-£1,439 with Fender Elite ABS moulded hardcase
- **BUILD** Alder (as reviewed) or ash body with gloss polyurethane finish; maple neck with satin urethane finish; rosewood (as reviewed) or maple fingerboard with compound C and D-profile and 241mm-355.6mm/9.5-14" compound radius; 22 medium jumbo frets; Deluxe Synchronized vibrato; synthetic bone nut; locking Fender tuners
- **ELECTRICS** 3x Fender 4th Generation Noiseless single coils
- **CONTROLS** Five-way blade selector, volume and two tone pots; S-1 push/push switch on volume pot
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes, at £1,509 in three-colour sunburst only
- **FINISH** Olympic Pearl (as reviewed), Mystic Black, Autumn Blaze Metallic, 3-Colour Sunburst, Aged Cherry Burst, Tobacco Sunburst, Sky Burst Metallic; limited edition 2-Colour Sunburst
- **SCALE LENGTH** 648mm/25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42.8mm at nut, 51mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 22.5mm at first fret, 24mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36mm at nut, 53mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.76kg/8.3lbs
- **CONTACT** Fender GB&I 01342 331700 **www.fender.com**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ A range of natural tones and a great neck
+ S-1 adds a great deal
+ High-quality finish

- Fingerboard a little dry
- Tortoiseshell scratchplate won't be to all tastes

The great new pickups, a veritable rainbow of lovely finishes and the new neck profile ensure that the Strat goes from strength to strength

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Fender American Elite Series Stratocaster HSS Shawbucker

- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody six-string guitar with a gloss polyurethane finish, manufactured in USA
- **PRICE** £1,389-£1,439 with Fender Elite ABS moulded hardcase
- **BUILD** Alder (as reviewed) or ash body with gloss polyurethane finish; maple neck with satin urethane finish; rosewood (as reviewed) or maple fingerboard with compound C and D-profile and 241mm-355.6mm/9.5-14-inch compound radius; 22 medium jumbo frets; Deluxe Synchronized vibrato; synthetic bone nut; locking Fender tuners
- **ELECTRICS** 1x Fender Shawbucker, 2x Fender 4th Generation Noiseless single coils
- **CONTROLS** Five-way blade selector, volume and two tone pots; S-1 push/push switch on volume pot; push/push Passing Lane switch
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISH** Autumn Blaze Metallic (as reviewed), Mystic Black, Olympic Pearl, 3-Colour Sunburst
- **SCALE LENGTH** 648mm/25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42.8mm at nut; 51mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 22.5mm at first fret, 24mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36mm at nut, 53mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.76kg/8.3lbs

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Huge variety of tones
+ Lovely neck
+ Sumptuous finish

- Passing Lane circuitry bypasses the volume pot so use it carefully!
- The button's not visible from a standing position

The non-traditional vibe of an HSS Strat can sometimes be off-putting. This is one of the most versatile guitars we've tried in a while and you will love it

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Fender American Elite Series Telecaster

- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody six-string guitar with a gloss polyurethane finish, manufactured in USA
- **PRICE** £1,389-£1,439 with Fender Elite ABS moulded hardcase
- **BUILD** Alder body with gloss polyurethane finish; maple neck with satin urethane finish; rosewood or maple (as reviewed) fingerboard with compound C and D-profile, and 241mm-355.6mm/9.5-14-inch compound radius; 22 medium jumbo frets; USA Tele bridge; synthetic bone nut; locking Fender tuners
- **ELECTRICS** 2x Fender 4th Generation Noiseless single coils
- **CONTROLS** Three-way blade selector, volume and tone pots; S-1 push/push switch on volume pot
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISH** Mystic Black (as reviewed), Autumn Blaze Metallic, 3-Colour Sunburst, Aged Cherry Burst, Butterscotch Blonde, Tobacco Sunburst
- **SCALE LENGTH** 648mm/25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42.8mm at nut, 51mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 22.5mm at first fret, 24mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36mm at nut, 53mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.58kg/7.9lbs

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Provides an incredible diversity of great tones
+ Looks fantastic
+ Is true to a classic Tele vibe

- The S-1 options are unavoidably reduced

Leo's genius lives on in the form of this excellent guitar. It's usable in just about any scenario – you will both look and sound great with this little beauty in your hands

9/10

KAUER ARCTURUS £2,049

ELECTRIC GUITAR

Kauer Arcturus

Kauer guitars feature high-quality tonewoods, boutique pickups and on-trend shapes. **HUW PRICE** tests out the Arcturus

Besides being a fine-looking offset guitar, there are two features that really distinguish the Kauer Arcturus. The first is the choice of Spanish cedar for the body – a wood associated more closely with cigar humidors than lutherie.

Known scientifically as cedrela odorata, it's neither Spanish nor cedar. Closely related to mahogany, it has long been used in the manufacture of flamenco guitars, and US guitar companies – including Martin – used it to make necks well into the 20th century. As an attractive, lightweight and cost-effective alternative to mahogany, numerous prestigious guitar manufacturers now use Spanish cedar.

Secondly, there's the Lollar Gold Foil neck pickup made with authentic rubberised ferrite magnets, 44 AWG wire and a 1/8" tall bobbin. Proximity to the strings is critical in bringing out the best from these pickups. The originals had to be shimmed, but these Lollars are mounted in a pickup ring with height adjustment screws at each end.

In other respects, it's a fairly straightforward build, featuring a bolt-on maple neck with a wenge fingerboard. The pearly headstock logo is set into a black veneer that, in turn, is set into the headstock – a subtle but classy detail.

Under the pickguard, there's a universal rout, so you could order another Kauer pickguard with entirely different pickups to transform the guitar. When ordering, you can choose from a selection of pickups, hardware, colours and neck profile options.

The coatings are urethane and the quality is fairly high. However, in the absence of a spring cover, the Arcturus could have benefited from more sanding and prep time inside the rout.

The Arcturus is less pingy and lively in its transient attack, so the Spanish cedar definitely makes its presence felt

The spraying process hasn't covered the recess entirely with colour coats and the white base coat shows in patches.

In use

Guitarists tend to have fairly clear preferences for neck profiles, however most can make do with a neutral, medium-depth C. Consequently, many manufacturers use that as a default, but for this guitar, Kauer has opted for a road less travelled.

For starters, it's decidedly fat, which is no bad thing. However, the sides of the neck are cut square to the fingerboard and the straight line goes about 3mm beyond the fingerboard binding. Only then does the curve begin, so this is about as 'square shouldered' a neck as we've seen in a long time. >

The pearly Kauer logo on the headstock is complemented by a stylish black veneer

KEY FEATURES

Kauer Arcturus

- **DESCRIPTION** Solid electric guitar, manufactured in the USA
- **PRICE** £2,049
- **BUILD** Spanish cedar body, birdseye maple bolt-on neck with fat U profile, 12" radius wenge fingerboard with pearl dot inlays and 22 jumbo frets
- **HARDWARE** Vintage-style tremolo bridge, Sperzel locking tuners with pearloid buttons
- **ELECTRICS** Lollar Tele-style bridge pickup, Lollar Gold Foil, master volume & tone, three-way selector switch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 648mm/25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 43mm at nut, 52mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 22mm at first fret, 23mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36mm at nut, 56mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.4kg/7.4lbs
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes (no upcharge)
- **FINISH** Foam Green (urethane)
- **CONTACT** Coda Music 01438 350815 **www.coda-music.com**

The Gold Foil in the neck position delivers beautiful shimmering cleans

The Arcturus is Doug Kauer's first design with a bolt-on, 25.5" scale maple neck

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
The **Collings 360 LT £2,500** has an offset single-cut Junior vibe and is available with Gold Foils and a Bigsby. Offset alternatives include the Jazzmaster-shaped **Fano JM6 £1,699** and the **Koll Troubador II £1,799**.

The fingerboard edges have no rollover whatsoever – except at the very top of the neck on the bass side. None of this compromises the playability of the Arcturus, but it's hard to imagine this neck quickly developing an 'old slippers' level of comfort and familiarity. It also feels at odds with the otherwise sleek and streamlined mid-century modern aesthetic.

Fortunately, though the guitar arrives set up with a higher-than-average playing action, the feel is friendly and the tuning is very stable. Our unplugged tests reveal a full low-frequency resonance, strong mids and treble that chimes nicely over the top. This loud and full frequency response, coupled with impressive sustain, seems closer to what I would associate with a mahogany Les Paul Junior than an alder or swamp ash-bodied guitar.

The Arcturus is also less pingy and lively in its transient attack, so the Spanish cedar definitely makes its presence felt. There's even a hint of the 'built-in reverb' effect that S-type trem assemblies often provide. So, all things considered, there's ample tone for the pickups to work with.

As T-type bridge pickups go, the Arcturus' is a fairly hot one, but there's plenty of brightness to balance out the thick and woody lows. The bridge setting has more of a throaty early-50s vibe than late-50s or 60s twang, and it dwells in the hinterland between Broadcaster and P-90. It's actually smoother and not quite as bright-sounding as a vintage-spec P-90, although it has a touch more cocked-wah quack.

The Gold Foil matches the bridge pickup for output level, while providing a very appealing sonic contrast. There's hi-fi clarity without excessive treble and single notes are sweetly rounded. There's faultless string-to-string balance and clearly defined bass, but the Gold Foil's defining characteristic is an ethereal shimmer in the treble.

Nothing ever seems to jump out at you, so it's just as easy to play fingerstyle as it is to flatpick. Incredibly sensitive, the Gold Foil captures the most subtle of playing touches and sustains really well. The pretty-sounding clean tones morphs into something more growly and aggressive with added overdrive. Single notes become even more vocal and the delicate highs acquire a softer and more diffused quality that almost compels you to dig in and play hard.

The Gold Foil is a fine match for the bridge pickup because it's equally bright. The bridge pickup may not be a Nashville twanger, but if you prefer playing rocking riffs on a T-type it certainly delivers. It veers off into something far more rounded and tonally complex and the middle setting provides the best of both worlds. Ultimately, it's an impressive tonal range that covers country, R&B, blues, rootsy rock and more besides.

There are lots of classy touches, such as the laser-etched logos on the rear of the headstock and control cavity cover, the inset logo overlay and the retro knobs. The tuners are smooth and the pickups are amongst the very best. The pickguard, bridge and switch tip have a 'parts bin' vibe that some will like, but others may find incongruous with a guitar in this price range.

The Gold Foil captures the most subtle of playing touches and sustains well. The clean tones morph into something more aggressive with added overdrive

As an example of high-end contemporary American guitar manufacturing, we don't feel that the detailing or design here quite achieves the same level of coherence or panache we've seen from the likes of Dennis Fano and Saul Koll. Having said that, the Arcturus is available in 26 different colours with a choice of three bridges, two fretboard woods, two body woods and numerous pickup options, so there's huge scope for customisation. If you fancy something different with a cool blend of retro influences, give the Arcturus a whirl.

Guitar VERDICT

+ Stylish design
+ Excellent-sounding pickups
+ Tonal versatility
+ Light in weight

- Finish quality falls slightly short on our review model
- Unwieldy neck might be off-putting

The neck profile may feel ungainly to some and there are some finish imperfections, but this is an undeniably cool design that sounds excellent

8/10

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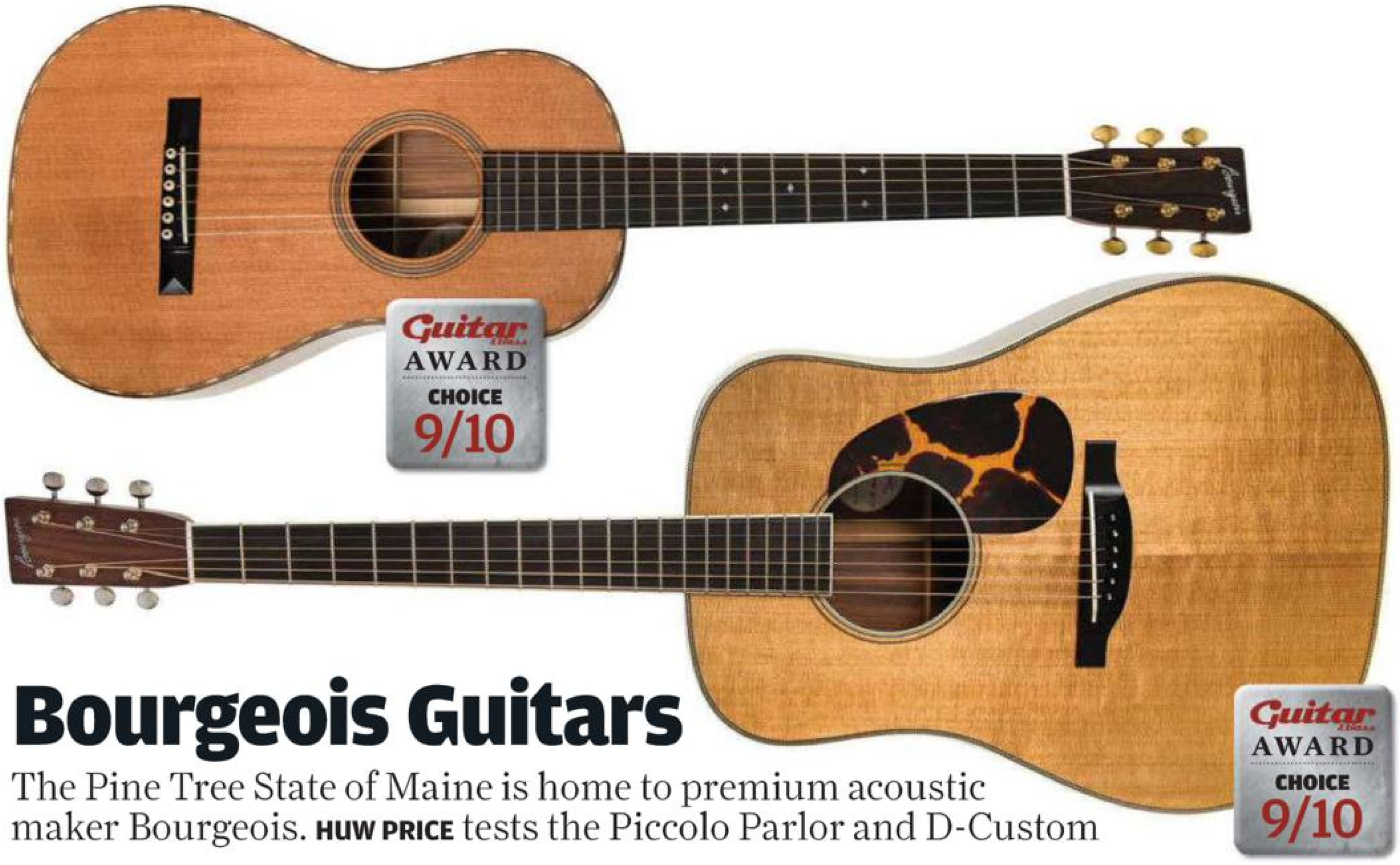

Bourgeois Guitars

The Pine Tree State of Maine is home to premium acoustic maker Bourgeois. **HUW PRICE** tests the Piccolo Parlor and D-Custom

Bourgeois has carved out a reputation as one of the finest acoustic guitar manufacturers. Most of its models, including the two featured here, are rooted in the pre-war Martin tradition and are built with premium tonewoods and materials.

Common features include bolted mahogany necks with diamond volutes and satin finishes, Waverly open gear tuners and bone nuts and saddles. While both are flawless, the finishes are different. The Piccolo is urethane and the D-Custom has Bourgeois' 'Aged Tone' cyanoacrylic.

Closely related to superglue, this recently-developed finish sets rock-hard, so it's claimed to sound like very old lacquer. However, it has the durability of a modern catalysed finish, so it will maintain its high gloss and won't 'age' like traditional materials.

Victorian Piccolo Parlor

Acoustic travel guitars are generally short on scale and refinements, and designed to fit in overhead lockers on planes. So the Piccolo is no travel guitar, because the scale length is 25 inches, it's highly refined and the design is so old the only locker it could be intended for is one of Wilbur Wright's.

The Piccolo is X braced for steel strings and features a redwood top with a Pao rosewood back and sides. The purflings and backstrip are herringbone and the figured koa bindings provide a honeyed contrast. Thick slices of ziricote are used for the peghead and heel cap, with ebony for the fingerboard and pyramid bridge. The Piccolo also has a body wood 'butt wedge'.

In use

This is not a guitar that demands a delicate touch – you can dig in. It plays like a dream with its sublimely soft V neck profile and the compensated bone saddle ensures sweet intonation.

This is not a guitar that demands a delicate touch – you can dig in. It plays like a dream with its soft V neck profile

The Piccolo has a tone that brings to mind vintage Westerns and has more in common with gut-string and even classical guitars than big dreadnoughts. Some parlors can sound a tad thin and plinky with steel strings, but this one has very full mids and single notes pack a solid punch.

Played delicately, the Piccolo has an ethereal, harp-like quality that begs you to mix up open strings and fretted notes for enigmatic chords – especially in open tunings – as harmonics hang on and drift inside the body.

The laws of physics prohibit deep lows, but what bass the Piccolo has is >

The Piccolo sports half-herringbone purflings and a herringbone backstrip

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Bourgeois Piccolo Parlor

Bedell's **Angelica Bellissima Parlor £3,399** combines Adirondack spruce with East Indian rosewood, Waverly tuners and K&K electronics. Slightly larger, the **Santa Cruz OO-Koa** has an all-koa body, slotted headstock and 24.75" scale length.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Bourgeois D-Custom Dreadnought

Tony Rice may own Clarence White's D-28, but he plays a **Santa Cruz signature model £3,999** that's based on the original. **Collings** offers two Clarence-White inspired models – the Adirondack-topped **CW28** and **CW18** have rosewood and mahogany back and sides respectively.

BOURGEOIS PICCOLO & D-CUSTOM £5,000 & £5,950

ACOUSTIC GUITARS

The D-Custom's gloss finish accentuates the grain of the Madagascar rosewood back and sides. In contrast, the back of the neck is satin to create a player-friendly feel

Strings

Storemags.com

firm and punchy. The treble is rolled off slightly, but the unwound strings combine a nylon-like roundness with a snappy percussive edge. You can pull up as hard as you like on the strings, Bert Jansch style, and the Piccolo can go all the way without compressing or going out of tune. A firmer right hand can coax the Piccolo into a rural blues direction. Even with its low action, this is a stunning bottleneck guitar. It's not designed for conventional acoustic rhythm duties, but it sounds like a baby archtop when you comp jazz chords and would be perfect for songwriters with quiet voices.

D-Custom Dreadnought

This guitar is based on one of the most iconic dreadnoughts of all. Bourgeois has taken inspiration from Clarence White's 1935 Martin D-28. In bluegrass circles, its widened soundhole is considered to be a vital element in White's tone and Bourgeois has replicated the widened soundhole and fretboard overhang of White's guitar. The soundhole is edged in the same ivoroid binding as the body, but rather than obscure all the end grain, Bourgeois has chosen to rout a ledge for the soundhole binding and the spruce is visible beneath.

In other ways, this guitar is based on Martin's pre-war dreadnoughts, with the same scalloped braces and advanced 'X'. The Madagascar rosewood back and sides are spectacular, but the really interesting bits are the soundboard and braces.

The fact that it's high-grade Adirondack spruce is more than enough to get excited about, but Bourgeois uses an aging process known as torrefaction, too. The timber is heat treated in a specific way to cook off the oils, sugars and resins that would normally vacate the wood over decades. The resulting honeycomb-like cellular structure resembles old wood, and it's claimed the tone is more 'vintage' too.

In use

The D-Custom is not for the faint of heart. The action is set high for the strings to ring loud and clear, and you need strong fingers to play high up the neck. It feels really good down the cowboy end, but isn't designed for easy picking all over the neck.

It's a full-frequency experience with none of the loose, woofy bass that detracts from some dreadnoughts. You get a crisply defined attack to single notes and robust low-end thump from strummed chords. There's ample treble too, without the pinginess that can blight fresh spruce and rosewood – instead an upper-harmonic halo that's like a natural chorus. If you think scooped mids are a recent thing, you should try a traditionally voiced dreadnought such as this. The low end provides the impetus, the treble lends definition and there's no harmonic clutter in the snare and vocal frequencies. The dynamic range is vast, without the crashy compression that limits some all-solid acoustics.

I couldn't find anything to criticise about the build quality or the finish of either guitar. The braces are carved so crisply you could cut yourself, and the workmanship has more in common with precision engineering than joinery.

Both these instruments are specialised, but I found the Piccolo to be the best all-rounder, and it's one of those guitars that keeps on surprising you. The D-Custom sounds as stunning as it looks, providing you understand what you're buying.

The Piccolo's pyramid bridge is formed from ebony

The large soundhole takes inspiration from Clarence White's 1935 Martin D-28

The Piccolo Parlor

The D-Custom Dreadnought

KEY FEATURES

Bourgeois Piccolo Parlor

- **DESCRIPTION** All-solid acoustic parlor guitar, made in the USA
- **PRICE** £5,000
- **BUILD** Redwood top with Pao rosewood back and sides, mahogany neck with diamond volute, ebony bridge and fingerboard, zircote peghead overlay, 12th-fret neck join, gold plated Waverly open gear tuners, bone bridge pins, nut and saddle, figured koa bindings, half-herringbone purflings, herringbone backstrip
- **HARDWARE** Custom tailpiece, 7075 aluminium bar bridge, Schaller open gear tuners
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes, special order
- **FINISH** Urethane, gloss body with satin neck
- **SCALE LENGTH** 636mm/25"
- **NECK WIDTH** 44mm at nut, 54.5mm at 12th fret
- **DEPTH OF NECK** 19mm at first fret, 24mm at ninth fret
- **STRING SPACING** 38mm at nut, 59mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 1.7kg/3.7lbs
- **CONTACT** The North American Guitar 0207 835 5597
  bourgeoisguitars.net
  thenorthamericanguitar.com

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Beautiful tone
+ Outstanding build quality and finish
+ Effortless playability
+ Surprisingly versatile

- Attenuated bass commensurate with body size

A small-bodied guitar that delivers massive tone and a complex and intriguing timbre, while boasting quite stunning build quality

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Bourgeois D-Custom Dreadnought

- **DESCRIPTION** All-solid acoustic parlor guitar, made in the USA
- **PRICE** £5,950
- **BUILD** Aged tone Adirondack spruce top with Madagascar rosewood back and sides, mahogany neck with diamond volute, ebony bridge, pins and fingerboard, Madagascar rosewood peghead overlay, 14th-fret neck join, nickel Waverly open gear tuners, bone nut and saddle, ivoroid bindings, herringbone purflings, zig-zag backstrip
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes, special order
- **FINISH** Aged tone (cyanoacrylic), gloss body with satin neck
- **SCALE LENGTH** 648 mm/25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 43.5mm at nut, 55mm at 12th fret
- **DEPTH OF NECK** 19mm at first fret, 23mm at 9th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 37mm at nut, 56mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 2kg/4.4lbs

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Clear and forceful tone
+ Outstanding build quality and finish
+ Very loud with great projection
+ Amazingly complex treble

- Doesn't pump bass like some dreads
- Action set high for bluegrass playing

A muscular and loud dreadnought with tightly controlled lows, ultra-crisp definition and some of the finest tone timber known to humanity

9/10

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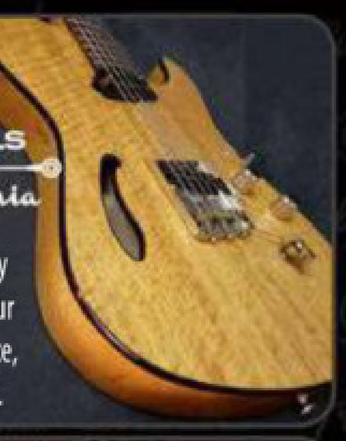

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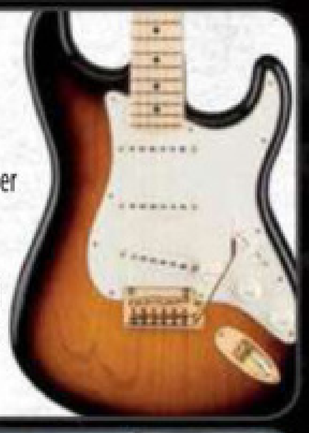

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Hughes & Kettner TubeMeister Deluxe 20

This new addition to H&K's TubeMeister range promises a step up in class and some interesting new features. **RICHARD PURVIS** gets tangled up in blue...

A Telecaster with extra-fat pickups, a Les Paul with extra-thin pickups, a little tweed combo with superior levels of mojo, even a bacon cheeseburger with added salad – when you see the word 'Deluxe', you expect something a bit special. This little lunchbox head may not initially appear particularly luxurious – in fact, it looks a lot like the TubeMeister 18 – but Hughes & Kettner has hidden some new goodies on the inside, and a few more round the back.

The output stage uses EL84s, like the other TubeMeisters, but the Deluxe 20's preamp – shared by its 40-watt big brother – is a new design influenced by that of H&K's mighty (and mightily expensive) TriAmp Mark 3. And while the XLR output for DI on the rear panel isn't new, the little red strip alongside it is. Four toggle switches now bring some of the added functionality of H&K's standalone Red Box unit, allowing you to mimic the sound of a mic'd-up cab with the choice of large or small, vintage or modern, at mic or line level.

Stuff we've seen before includes an effects loop, a tube safety control section that continually adjusts the bias to keep the power valves healthy and a power soak for shrinking the output down from 20 watts to 5, one or complete silence. You're right, there isn't much call for silent amplifiers, but that option could be useful for home recording via DI when there's a housemate watching Pointless Celebrities in the same room.

We'll come to the front panel in a sec, but let's just pause halfway round for a look at the Deluxe 20's distinctive side handles. Are these more practical than a simple plastic handle on the top? At this size and weight, no. They make the amp a little awkward to pick up with one hand, and awkward to lay back down flat afterwards. In fact, if you have fretboard-spanning gorilla hands, you may find it simpler to just grab across the top of the amp. Another drawback is that you have to unscrew both end panels in order to remove the top cover (to get to the valves) or the baseplate (to get to the circuit boards).

Single coils through the clean channel with the master volume at full and gain around 10 o'clock come out bright, fresh and full through an open-back 2x12

Everything on the front of the amp is familiar enough – including the way the whole thing gleams electric blue like some trippy aquarium. There's a three-band master EQ section on the left, and master volume and gain controls for each channel on the right. You can switch between clean and lead channels using the push buttons, which light up blue and orange respectively when selected. There's also a boost button, which lights up red; this works only on the lead channel. If, like the rest of the human race, you have only two arms and like to use them both to play your guitar, a standard double footswitch can be used for channel switching and engaging the boost.

In use

So, are we in for some deluxe sounds? Early impressions certainly point in that direction. Single coils through the clean channel with the master volume at full and gain around 10 o'clock come out bright, fresh and full through an open-back 2x12. If you've found some Hughes & Kettners a little stiff in the

KEY FEATURES

TubeMeister Deluxe 20

- **PRICE** £649, including softcase
- **DESCRIPTION** 20-watt valve head, made in China
- **VALVES** 2x ECC83, 2x EL84
- **FRONT PANEL** On/off and standby switches; treble, mid and bass; boost and lead/clean channel selectors; lead volume and gain, clean volume and gain; guitar input
- **REAR PANEL** FX loop send and return, footswitch input for channel switching and boost (footswitch not included); XLR DI output with cabinet emulation switches for vintage/modern, small/large, line/mic level and off/on; TSC valve bias checkpoint; 20w/5w/1w/mute power soak control, 8-16-ohm speaker output
- **DIMENSIONS** 355x155x150mm
- **WEIGHT** 5kg/11lbs
- **CONTACT** John Hornby Skewes 0113 286 5381
  www.jhs.co.uk
  hughes-and-kettner.com

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
It doesn't have the new preamp, but **H&K**'s **TubeMeister 18 Head £559** is the obvious alternative if you don't need the Deluxe's added DI options (or the extra two watts). **Peavey's ValveKing 20MH £540** is a rocking two-channel option with a clever Vari-Class control, while the original **Orange Tiny Terror £365** has only one channel... but what a channel it is.

past, prepare to have your opinion ever so slightly revised. The Deluxe 20 is touch-responsive in a way that makes you want to keep on playing, and bumping up the gain past halfway only increases the fun as a wisp of crunch begins to scuff up the edges of airy, chiming chords.

With humbuckers, the grit arrives earlier, as you'd expect, and it's no

The Deluxe 20 is touch-responsive in a way that makes you want to keep on playing, and bumping up the gain past halfway only increases the fun

less satisfying. There's plenty of headroom, but also more gain than you might expect from the 'clean' half of a channel-switching amp. Maxing it out brings full-on overdrive that's perfect for powerchords and self-indulgent workouts, with an element of EL84 fizz but an overall sound that's more about Fender chunkiness than Vox shimmer.

There is an overlap between the two channels – full gain on 'clean' is roughly equivalent to 10 o'clock on the lead channel in terms of distortion, but the second channel is more overtly aggressive and can never match the first for warmth. It's clear and powerful, if not the tightest rock sound ever – chords can get a little mushy in the bottom end at high gain levels, though you can control this to an extent with the tonestack. The Deluxe 20 seems happiest in general with a slight V shape here, pulling out just a touch of midrange snarl to let the amp breathe, but the treble control has a bit more to say for itself than the other two. Push it past three o'clock and, as well as adding top end, it begins to filter out the bass in a fairly musical way. And the boost? It doesn't make the amp appreciably louder, but adds fullness and sustain in a way that should facilitate your show-stealing up-shift from rhythmic chugging to unabashed widdle-mania.

Both master volume controls work well and, as long as you don't go lower than about halfway, the amp will retain more presence and body this way than by switching down to five-watt mode. That's not to say the power soak is a failure – it's absolutely fine – but there's no denying this head sounds best with everything fully open.

On the other hand, the old lady next door's just gone up for an early night, bless her, so it's time to set that power soak to zero and try out the Deluxe 20's DI capabilities. If this does the business, it'll surely be a godsend for gigging guitarists as well as home recordists – getting a proper amped sound straight into the PA means not having to have one of those oh-so-kickable mic stands pushed up against your cab ever again.

It does the business. The 'off' setting reveals the true, plasticky horror of untreated guitar DI – useful only if you want to record a raw signal for software amping – and the difference when you turn on the cabinet emulation is striking. The plastic melts away, transient spikes are naturally subdued, and the effect is impressively realistic. Switching from small cab to large adds a dollop of extra heft to the bass, while the vintage/modern switch takes you from a classically balanced response to something more mean and wiry.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Big, lively cleans and rich overdrive
+ Convincing and super-flexible DI
+ An excellent pedal platform

- Side handles aren't the best
- Nicest clean and dirty sounds are both on the same channel

Probably the sweetest-sounding Hughes & Kettner we've tried, and a very welcome addition to the lunchbox crowd

9/10

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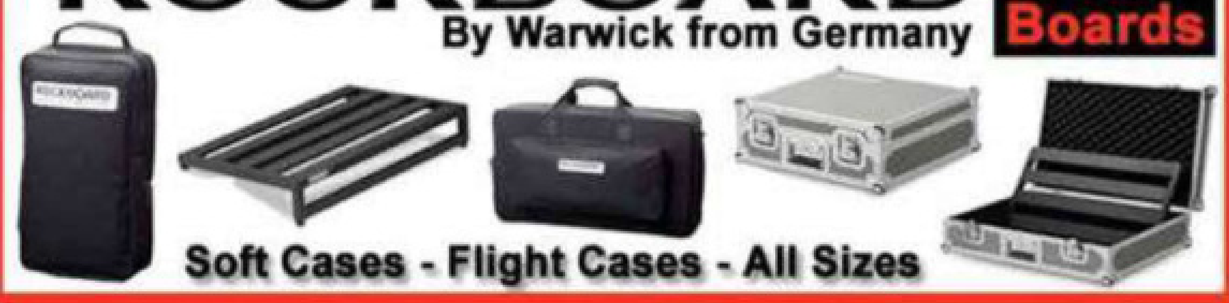

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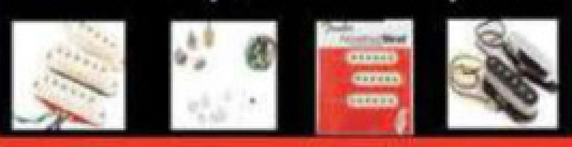

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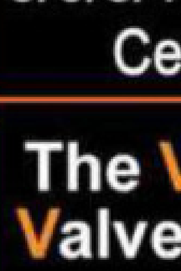

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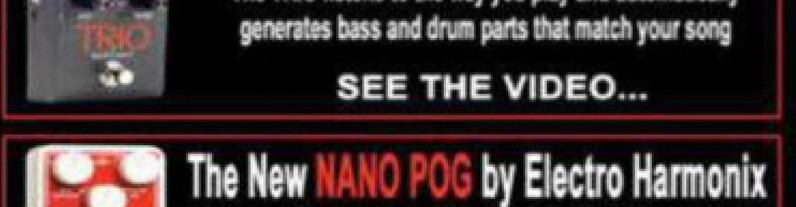

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Yerasov Hammerhead

This one-channel, handwired valve head is voiced for British heavy-rock tones, but does it nail that sound? **HUW PRICE** puts the Yerasov Hammerhead to the test

Made in Russia by the firm founded by Alexander Yerasov, the Hammerhead is based on 1970s Marshall designs. Rectification is solid-state and there's a master volume to complement the presence and TMB controls. There's a bypassable effects loop that operates at +4dB or -10dB, and three speaker outputs labelled 4, 8 and 16 ohm.

Inside, the build quality is equal to any boutique amp manufacturer and a lot better than many. The Hammerhead is constructed on a type of tagboard I've never seen before, so I'm fondly imagining it's Soviet-era stuff. Yerasov also fits a USA-made Classic Tone output transformer.

The white tolex covering is neat, and black anodised corner protectors match the grilles. It's not the most imaginative design, but the mid-80s look has a certain Randy Rhoads chic.

In use

This is a loud, aggressive rock amp that, as the name suggests, really hammers it home. The bass is huge and solid, the ample mids pummel your chest and the treble could cut through anything – it's not an amp for sweet, glassy Hendrix cleans. The sonic reference point is more mid-70s to mid-80s hard rock and metal than 60s blues rock, and the gain control has to be turned fairly high to bring things to life. At low-gain and high-master settings there is huge clean headroom, but without overdrive-induced compression from the preamp some may find it too spiky. Reversing the gain and master settings eases the Hammerhead into overdrive, with increased harmonic content.

The distortion characteristic is fizz-free and single notes begin with a crisp attack before sliding into velvety sustain

Neither vintage-style single coils nor PAFs are an ideal match for the Hammerhead's brightness, but I enjoyed dialing in Malcolm Young tones using Filter'Trons. You have to keep the treble and presence fairly low to get usable sounds, but the middle control is less useful because the centre frequency is so high in the midrange.

Fortunately, I had a Tele on hand with dark, high-output humbuckers. It gets the best out of the Hammerhead, with fat powerchords that retain definition in the bass and clarity in the treble. The tone controls also respond familiarly. Switching to a Clapton Strat, the Hammerhead shines. With high-output active pickups and a mid boost, it's a metal tone monster. The distortion characteristic is fizz-free and single notes begin with a crisp attack before sliding into a velvety sustain. When I turned down the guitar volume, I found the refined and shimmery highs that eluded me with vintage-style pickups.

The Hammerhead must be teamed with high-output pickups. Get that right and you'll be rewarded with huge pure valve crunch and punishing power.

Guitar VERDICT

+ Outstanding build quality
+ Very loud
+ No sag
+ Creamy overdrive
+ Excellent definition

- Doesn't do old-school
- Fussy about pickups
- No power reduction feature
- Midrange control frequency relatively high
- Stiff feel

As a specialised hard-rock and metal amp it's very impressive, and where else are you going to find a handwired 50-watt valve head at a price as low as this?

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Yerasov Hammerhead

- **PRICE** £624, plus delivery
- **DESCRIPTION** One-channel, handwired valve head with effects loop, made in Russia
- **POWER RATING** 50W
- **VALVES** 3x ECC83S, 2x EL34
- **CONTROL PANEL** Power, standby, presence, bass, middle, treble, master, gain, input jacks x2
- **REAR PANEL** 4-, 8-, 16-ohm speaker outputs, effects loop in/out, +4/-10dB switch, loop bypass switch
- **SPEAKER** N/A
- **DIMENSIONS** 560x255x230mm
- **WEIGHT** 15.5kg/34.1lbs
- **CONTACT** 07534 429269 **www.yerasov.co.uk**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The **Marshall 1987X £1,339** is a reissue of a circa '72 JMP 50 head with an added effects loop and PCB construction. Gartone makes some of the finest Marshall-style amps we've tried and the handwired **Regent 50 £1,750** features a switchable master volume. **Rift Amps' Plexi 45 £1,500** is handwired with KT66 power valves.

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J Rockett Archer Ikon, ThorpyFX Peacekeeper & Wampler Tumnus

No pain, low gain? **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** dips into one of the most flooded areas of the market and tries three leading contenders

The boutique effects business has mushroomed in recent years, and there's probably no more congested area than that of boosts and low-gain overdrives. Here, we've rounded up three new low-to-medium gain drive pedals that have been kicking up a storm recently and are testing them side by side.

Flying the flag for the Brits in this rundown is the new Peacekeeper from Swindon-based company ThorpyFX. 2015 was a very good year indeed for ThorpyFX mainman, explosive ordnance disposal specialist and British Army Major Adrian Thorpe. Regular *G&B* readers will have seen his Shotgun and Muffroom Cloud pedals draw plaudits in these very pages, with the Gunshot receiving a coveted Highly Commended award in the Best Effects category in our Gear Of The Year issue.

"The Peacekeeper is my response to people requesting I do a Klon clone, or something like the Analog Man King Of Tone, or the Paul Cochrane Timmy," says Thorpe. "At this stage, I think there are plenty of great klones out there, so I decided it would be best to produce a low-gainer that is flexible enough to cover [the same ground as] all of the legends out there from one box.

"To achieve this, it was necessary to do something different with the EQ. The Peacekeeper has an active treble and bass that is positioned post-overdrive. This means that the overdriven sound never gets too shrill or oversaturated in bass. The Peacekeeper also has a pre-overdrive presence control. What this does is change the characteristic of the driven tone from smooth through to much more crunchy. It makes the Peacekeeper incredibly versatile and able to produce so many styles of low-gain tone, all from one box."

Even original Klons can vary – it's more about what works in the context of your rig than the search for some sort of definitive holy grail

Inside and out, the Peacekeeper is as neat, impressive and robust as Major Thorpe's previous offerings, so you get metal film resistors with a one per cent tolerance, WIMA and Panasonic capacitors, a Burr-Brown op amp and a thick PCB with gold-plated component holes. The blue, powder-coated baseplate offers kick-protection for the control knobs, though the laser-etched stainless steel enclosure is so mirror-like that it makes it hard to see the control panel lettering from a standing position. That said, once you learn what each control knob is for this isn't a problem.

As Thorpe suggests, there are indeed "plenty of great klones out there" these days, but each of the US-built pedals we're looking at alongside the Peacekeeper is vying to be the most sonically authentic replica of Bill Finnegan's Klon Centaur yet. Given that the voicing of individual Klon units can vary in A/B comparison tests, it's more about what works in the >

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
The **Electro-Harmonix Soul Food £61** is one of the most affordable klones on the market. For a more old-school boost, the **MXR Micro Amp £76** has a single knob but pushes your signal musically in all the right places. **Free The Tone**'s **Red Jasper £205** is much more expensive and much less practical, but sounds excellent as either a smooth boost or mid-gain drive.

context of your rig than the search for some sort of definitive holy grail, but Colorado natives Chris Van Tassel and Jay Rockett, aka J Rockett Audio Designs, have some pedigree and experience in the field, having been involved in the production of the first 1,500 of Finnegan's Klon KTR pedals. The first, silver JRAD Archer was a real hit, which ended up on pedalboards across the globe and was the winner of the Best Effects category in our 2015 Gear Of The Year awards. The Archer Ikon is the follow-up, and it takes inspiration from the warmer-sounding gold incarnation of the Centaur.

Anatomically, the Ikon is essentially identical to the silver Archer, although when we dismantled the Ikon and compared it to a recent silver model we noticed that, while the Ikon has germanium diodes, J Rockett appears to have switched to silicon diodes in the same position on the board of its more recent silver units. The other important stuff – the internal 18-volt charge pump and buffered bypass – remains in situ, and it's all powered by a nine-volt centre-negative PSU or battery.

The Wampler Tumnus – named after CS Lewis's Mr Tumnus, a faun rather than a centaur, get it? – is manufactured in Paducah, Kentucky and is the highly-respected boutique effects company's take on a Klon. Rather than seeking out 'magic diodes', Brian Wampler has concentrated on replicating the Centaur tone and is able to squeeze the necessary components into a much more pedalboard-friendly housing thanks to its exceedingly space-efficient SMT circuit board.

Inside the teeny-tiny Tumnus, there's no room for a battery. It's not an issue for those with power supplies integrated into their pedalboard set-up, but if you want to turn up to a recording session with just a boost and plug in to the house amp (something we've done on a few occasions lately), then having to worry about an external nine-volt adaptor and another trailing wire across the studio floor might be a headache. If a well-stocked pedalboard is a must, then it's worth noting that the side-mounted jacks on mini pedals don't actually save much width compared to top loaders such as the Ikon and Peacekeeper.

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In use

Let's start with what the Klon is famed for delivering: a beautiful clean boost with a subtle dose of additional midrange and compression. It's a thing of wonder and the ultimate 'better switch' that you'll want to leave on all the time. In an attempt to emulate this, we first A/B the Archer Ikon and the Peacekeeper. Setting the Peacekeeper's EQ and presence controls flat, we max the volume and roll the gain right back.

Similarly, we centre the Archer's treble control and zero the gain. With the Archer's output control maxed, it has a fair bit of extra level beyond the Peacekeeper and pushes our clean 6V6 combo into a wonderful tweedy breakup with bags of chime – it's a fabulous sound for big power-pop chords that sits somewhere in the mid Atlantic, especially with our Alnico Blue test speaker and ES-335 bridge pickup. The best bits of Vox and tweed in one voice? In the context of this rig, certainly, and it's tough to switch off. Compared to the earlier silver Archer unit, as a clean boost the Ikon is a little smoother and more sophisticated.

Back to the Peacekeeper, and as a pure clean boost we find that its maxed volume level is equivalent to around one o'clock on the Archer Ikon's output control. With the EQ flat and the Ikon's output rolled back to match the Peacekeeper, neither pedal makes the amplifier sing quite as beautifully as the Ikon did when maxed out, but there's a noticeable difference in the way each pedal pushes the amp, despite matched levels.

The Ikon has a little more presence and chime and a delicious sparkle, while the Peacekeeper is more coarse and muscular. Using either, we're in really touch-sensitive, expressive territory here for lead and rhythm, and it makes us wonder if we'd need anything else other than a little reverb or slapback for ambience. Neither pedal is better or worse, just different, and of course there's plenty of scope to tweak the controls to taste – but more on that shortly.

It's time to introduce the Tumnus, and with its gain control rolled off and the treble centred, the Tumnus sounds almost identical to the Peacekeeper when playing lead licks and chiming arpeggios. Chords and low-register parts accentuate the Wampler unit's big bass response, which sounds nicely full in isolation, but this isn't necessarily helpful in a band mix alongside a bassist if you are using humbuckers. It is, however, a great thickener for thinner-sounding Strats and Teles.

The Tumnus also has a higher overall level than the Peacekeeper and pushes nearly as much air as the Archer. Using the two klones with their outputs at full tilt renders their voicing differences in bold type – you can really hear that extra fatness come through from the Wampler unit, while the Ikon literally and figuratively edges it thanks to a little extra sparkle that makes our ES-335 sing.

When it comes to EQ, the Peacekeeper's powerful post-overdrive active treble and bass controls allow you to add or subtract highs or lows in a much more sophisticated and exaggerated way than either of the other units, so adding a little treble gets the Peacekeeper closer to the Ikon's centered clean boost tone, though the latter still has a slightly sweeter midrange. Similarly, adding some bass brings the Peacekeeper closer to the Tumnus, although there is something uniquely smoky and silky about the Wampler's voicing that sounds great for a slow blues.

If we were shopping purely for a boost we'd be taking the Archer Ikon home – it has the most headroom, the loudest voice and adds a widescreen sheen

At this stage, if we were shopping purely for a boost we'd be taking the Archer Ikon home – it has the most headroom, the loudest voice and a nice widescreen sheen that we really like. It's dead simple to use, runs on a battery if you need it to and doesn't take up much space when plumbed in to a more complex set-up, thanks to top-loaded jacks. The buffer is handy in a simple set-up with long leads, too.

The Peacekeeper is a lot more than just a boost, of course, and we turn to it first when it's time to wind up the dirt. With all three pedals' gain controls now centered and their volume levels

matched by ear (equality is found with the klones set at just past 9 o'clock and the Peacekeeper at noon), we roll the Peacekeeper's pre-overdrive presence control right back; and of the three pedals, Thorpy's is now immediately the most transparent, open and 3D-sounding.

While the Ikon was gloriously hi-fi with the gain rolled off, it now feels slightly constricted and boxy, and the Tumnus' extra bass just makes it a warmer version of the same.

Turning up the treble control on either pedal improves matters, particularly in the case of the Wampler unit, which really begins to open up – but of course, the Peacekeeper is only just getting started... from here you can wind up its presence control to add extra grit as well as top-end cut, and use the bass and treble to fine-tune it.

The Peacekeeper stacks excellently, too, and plays nicely in front of fuzzes, as it's true bypass. Our favourite pairing here was achieved by running the Peacekeeper in medium-gain mode for rhythm then stepping on the Archer, set up in front as a clean boost, for lead.

Low-gainers they may be, but all of these pedals can get alt. rock dirty if you need them to. We tend to be of the opinion that Klons and their clones sound best at the extremes of their gain controls, and both the Tumnus and Archer Ikon reinforce this – with the slightly disappointing response of the 12 o'clock setting giving way into a throaty overdrive as you crank the gain. The boxiness widens out into a bigger sound altogether on both pedals, though most of the action is in the final 15 per cent of the gain control's travel as the overdrive ramps up fast. The Tumnus is thicker, while the Archer is more aggressive and vocal in the upper midrange, which again may be your preference for band use.

In comparison to both klones, the Peacekeeper's mids are much less forward, the overall gain and sustain level is lower and there's less willing feedback from our ES-335 – though it's there if you want it. The presence, bass and treble controls offer a much more dramatic sweep with the gain ramped, and it's capable of some pretty aggressive, abrasive grit; but into a loud clean amp it doesn't really deliver endless liquid sustain in the way that many Tube Screamer-derived circuits do. We found that pushing the presence up to around 2-3 o'clock and rolling back the treble a notch or two delivers the most fluid lead voice with the gain cranked.

When it comes to low-gainers, what they sound like in isolation isn't really the point, as the whole intention for these circuits is to couple them with a valve amp and one or two other choice drives. And, in that context, all three of these pedals excel. If we were forced to pick just one, our favourite clean boost would be the Archer Ikon, our choice for mid-gain rhythm sounds would be the Peacekeeper, and our go-to unit for fattening up a Fender would be the Tumnus.

KEY FEATURES

J Rockett Archer Ikon

- **PRICE** £165
- **DESCRIPTION** Buffered bypass boost/overdrive pedal powered by 9v centre-negative power supply or battery, made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Output, gain, treble
- **DIMENSIONS** 59mm(w)x101mm(d)x31mm(h)
- **CONTACT** Zoom UK Distribution 08432 080 999 **www.rockettpedals.com**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ The best clean boost of the bunch, with a lovely high-end sheen that you won't want to switch off
+ Chunky build with a small footprint
+ 95 per cent of the Klon experience for 10 per cent of the price

– Battery access a little fiddly

The gold Archer Ikon improves on the silver version that impressed us last year and, while it's not cheap, it will make you cheerful. A keeper

9/10

KEY FEATURES

ThorpyFX Peacekeeper

- **PRICE** £194
- **DESCRIPTION** True bypass boost/overdrive pedal powered by 9v centre-negative power supply or battery, made in UK
- **CONTROLS** Volume, gain, treble, bass, presence
- **DIMENSIONS** 70mm(w)x145mm(d)x60mm(h)
- **CONTACT** **thorpyfx.com**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Much more control over your tone than the average low-gainer
+ Versatile boost, gritty standalone rhythm machine
+ A fair price for such fantastic build quality

– Control panel lettering hard to read under lights

Built meticulously, the Peacekeeper has the scope and control to deliver in many different contexts

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Wampler Tumnus

- **PRICE** £159
- **DESCRIPTION** Buffered bypass boost/overdrive pedal powered by 9v centre-negative power supply only, made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Gain, level, treble
- **DIMENSIONS** 35mm(w)x90mm(d)x33mm(h)
- **CONTACT** **wamplerpedals.com**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Klon-like tone in a small box
+ The rich bottom end and midrange response is great for fattening thin single-coil tones and adding depth to blues lead parts
+ High gain settings on some klones can be rather boxy or scratchy – this is not the case here

– No battery option

If you are a Strat or Tele player looking for a fuller-fat klone, this is it

8/10

Storemags

Antares ATG-1

The inventor of Auto-Tune has come up with a new multifarious magic box for guitarists; **RICHARD PURVIS** fits a hexaphonic pickup to his Tele and gets tuned in

KEY FEATURES

Antares ATG-1

- **PRICE** £699
- **DESCRIPTION** Digital Auto-Tune and pitch processor, made in The Philippines
- **CONTROLS** Data wheel, four function buttons, expression pedal; footswitches for string tune, control/preset and bank select; footswitches for selecting presets or modelling functions: Volume, Alt Tuning, Pickup, Pitch Shift, Capo, Double, Model and Tone; 9V power input, left/mono and right analogue outputs, digital guitar input and output, MIDI in, out and thru
- **CONTACT** Sonic 8 Limited 033 0202 0160 **sonic8.com** **autotuneforguitar.com**

Want to make a serious musician really, really angry? There are a few topics that are almost guaranteed to get even the most placid guitarist brimming with rage. Simon Cowell is a good one, for his services to TV talent shows; streaming services are another, because of the pitiful royalty rates; and then there's Auto-Tune – the controversial 'cheating' tool that means singers don't even need to be able to sing anymore.

Pour yourself a brandy, take some deep breaths and think about kittens until you've calmed down, because we're about to look at an Auto-Tune product for guitarists, and it really isn't anything to get angry about. After all, when you think about it, we're already cheating by using frets.

Antares is the company that brought Auto-Tune to the world, and it's now using some of that expertise to help guitarists play in tune. But, as you can probably tell by the number of footswitches on the ATG-1, this is no one-trick pony. Auto-Tune works by taking the note you sing or play and replacing it with a digitally corrected version – and once you're in that digital domain, it's just as easy to replace it with something completely different.

So this is a powerful processor that also offers instant alternative tunings, pitch shifting, 12-string effects, and even modelling of different guitar types. There's an expression pedal for dizzying pitch swoops and room for eight banks of eight presets. The only thing it doesn't have is an input for your guitar.

Yes, that's right, it doesn't have a guitar input. To do all this processing, the ATG-1 needs a separate signal from each of your instrument's six strings, and for that you're going to need a hexaphonic pickup with a 13-pin interface, such as the Roland GK-3. If you don't have one already, it'll set you back around £100, and installation can be quite fiddly depending on what sort of guitar you're using. Our plucky volunteer was a Telecaster, chosen for simplicity: the pickup sticks to the scratchplate with two self-adhesive pads, and the main unit is held in place by the rear strap button, with felt pads protecting the instrument's finish.

A 13-pin cable takes this digital signal into the Antares unit, and at this point your guitar is not your guitar anymore: if you want Telecaster-like sounds now, you can simply select Nashville Single Coil in the Model menu and work with the emulation. That may seem weird and unnatural to many players, but we're promised top-class processing with inaudibly low latency, so it should sound and feel just like, well, playing the guitar.

In use

The best way to get your head around a complex machine such as this is, of course, to jab wildly at random footswitches and hope for the best. Actually, there are some calibration steps to go through first – for example, the ATG-1 needs to know your guitar's scale length so it can judge intonation accurately – but other than that it is pretty much plug and play.

The first footswitch to jab at is probably going to be the String Tune one: strum all six open strings, press this and listen in awe as they all sweep

This is a powerful processor that also offers instant alternative tunings, pitch shifting, 12-string effects and even modelling of different guitar types

You'll need a hexaphonic pickup such as this Roland GK-3 to hook up the ATG-1 to your guitar

down a tone or two, then up into perfect tuning. It requires a good hard strum to wake it up (or at least our review unit did), but once it gets there the Auto-Tuned playing experience is remarkably normal – and if you slip out of tune again, another strum and stomp will bring it back. There's no distracting latency, and it's very effective at not trying to fight against string bends.

And so we move on to the other, even cleverer features of this device. Working with presets is intuitive enough, so we won't waste too much time talking about the user interface – the important part is the eight numbered functions and what they do.

when you've arrived at the tuning you want, it's easily stored in a preset. All of the tunings sound uncannily natural; the only strangeness comes when your amp is set so low that you can still hear a little of the guitar's acoustic sound clashing against it.

Switches 3 and 7 work together, offering a range of guitar types and allowing you to select different pickup positions for each: choose an LP-type and you'll have three settings, choose an S-type and there'll be five. There's even a bass option and an impressive acoustic – in fact three of them, as in this mode the Pickup footswitch allows you to hop between dreadnought, OM and fingerstyle voices. Like playing a Line 6 Variax, it never quite has the feel of the real thing, but there's no denying the emulations are technically accurate.

Like everything else about this unit, the doubling effects work with impressive simplicity and will leave you marvelling at the power of digital processing

Volume comes first, and it's the simplest – allowing you to store presets with different output levels and, more usefully, to turn the onboard expression pedal into a volume control for violin-like swells. It works just as well as it should. Next to that is Alt Tuning, and there are plenty of options, from folky DADGAD to metal-style drop-D. You can use the expression pedal to scroll through them, but it makes more sense to simply keep pressing the footswitch;

Pitch shift takes you into the freaky world of the DigiTech Whammy, allowing you to set your up and down intervals then screech crazily between the two with the expression pedal. It works faultlessly and is more fun than watching Bergerac in your pyjamas. Capo works in a similar way, but with fixed one-fret intervals, predictably enough, while Tone is equally self-explanatory; use the expression pedal in this mode and you can get a very mild wah effect.

That just leaves the Double footswitch, home to a wide range of octave, harmony and 12-string effects. These offer a lot of entertainment for the sonically uninhibited; both 12-string sounds have been detuned slightly, which brings a hint of chorus-like modulation, while the harmoniser settings track tightly all over the fretboard. Like everything else about this unit, the doubling effects work with impressive simplicity and will leave you marvelling at the power of modern digital processing; the only question is whether you want these capabilities enough to make such a big investment in what may or may not be the future of guitar playing.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

If you'd rather keep your guitar's pure sound and do the manipulating afterwards, you may prefer the **Antares Auto-Tune 8** plug-in for Pro Tools **£269**. The **Line 6 Variax Standard £517** is a guitar with modelling of different instruments and tunings built in, while a popular option for pitch mangling is the **DigiTech Whammy DT £215**.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ It works – you'll never be out of tune again
+ Provides instant access to a range of alternative tunings
+ Enables useful modelling of different guitar types

- More hissy than an analogue guitar signal
- You'll need to fit a hexaphonic pickup

A clever tool that does lots of cool things... although it may not appeal to tonal purists

8/10

McNelly Sparkletron

All that sparkles is not gold, but it could be for an extra five quid. **HUW PRICE** does the twang thang with a nickel set of McNelly Sparkletrons

KEY FEATURES

McNelly Sparkletrons

- **PRICE** £94 each or £189 per set
- **DESCRIPTION** Soapbar-mount Filter'Tron-style pickups, made in Canada
- **SPECS** 42 AWG poly-insulated magnet wire, alnico V magnets, adjustable polepieces, wax potted, nickel or gold covers
- **CONTACT** Home Of Tone 07976 972884 **www.mcnellyguitars.com**

For many years, TV Jones was the only manufacturer offering a superior-quality alternative to the stock Gretsch Filter'Tron, and even Gretsch started installing TVs in high-end models. Nowadays, it's not uncommon for pickup makers to offer Filter'Tron replacements – and the Sparkletron is McNelly's version. It features wax potted coils hand wound with 42 AWG wire, alnico 5 magnets and quarter-inch wood spacers.

In use

Since these pickups don't have the extended ears of vintage Filter'Trons, I put them in a La Cab-style Tele with a maple neck and swamp ash body. Fortunately, I had an almost identical La Cab loaded with a pair of TV Jones Classics to hand for comparison.

Both sets of pickups have obvious Filter'Tron attributes: low-ish output, a slightly scooped low-mid response and a tendency to twang. However, they are different in nature. The TVs are louder and more forceful, with more push in the upper-mids. The Sparkletrons sound clearer and smoother, making the TVs seem slightly harsh with overdrive.

I could also pick up more of the guitar's woody character with the Sparkletrons, and the lower output interfaces well with old-school amps. On balance, I'd say the McNellys sound more like vintage Gretsch Filter'Trons than the TVs, although both sets lack the acoustic 'fairy dust' in the high treble you get with unpotted pickups.

All three settings sounded quite distinct. The bridge produces a fair bit of Tele-like quack, but compared to a Tele pickup the treble sounds a lot softer and sweeter. You can twang on the low strings, and the high strings have a full-bodied 'pinginess', with a slightly compressed transient attack.

The neck position takes on a sweeter and more vocal quality, that's super-clear and balanced. These pickups are very sensitive and you can really tell the difference between a plectrum, thumb pick and fingers. They also share the ability of an authentic Gibson-style PAF to sustain notes – regardless of gain and volume settings. The in-between setting emphasises the low-midrange scoop, and a phasey haze spreads across the upper-mids. The transient response is fairly forgiving and the middle setting softens things even more, which suits fingerstyle playing a treat.

Although they have a fairly low output by modern standards, the Sparkletrons don't lack power. They're well known for their countrified and twangy rockabilly tones, but this style of pickup works fantastically well with overdrive. The Sparkletrons cut through dirt and fuzz to provide definition without edginess, and bass strings retain a tight and growly focus. After all, vintage Filter'Trons formed the basis of the AC/DC sound for decades.

McNelly has pretty much nailed the Filter'Tron thing with this set, although vintage obsessives might appreciate a bit more microphonic response to really open out the treble. Whether that could be achieved by winding the coils a little looser or skipping the wax potting stage is something you can discuss with the UK distributor. Fortunately, McNelly is still able to fulfil customer requests but, even with this stock set, my La Cab has never sounded better.

The Sparkletrons cut through dirt and fuzz to provide definition, and bass strings retain a tight, growly focus

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE... Soapbar-mount Filter'Tron-style alternatives include the **TV Jones TV Classic £95**, **Mojo Pickups Mojotron Vintage £75**, **Creamery Classic Black Cat £154** (set) and the **Oil City Cow-T-Ron £80**.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Very convincing vintage Filter'Tron tone
+ Sweet upper-mids
+ Tons of twang and growl
+ Very touch-responsive
+ Woody cleans
+ Well defined with overdrive
+ No squeal

- Needs a touch of microphony for truly vintage tone

Pretty much everything you could want from vintage-style Filter'Trons and more

9/10

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ECC83-S	20 Pcs	£6.60 Each	6L6GC	16 Pcs	£12.72 Each
ECC83-S	40 Pcs	£6.00 Each	6V6GTS	16 Pcs	£11.40 Each
ECC83-MG	10 Pcs	£9.60 Each	5881	16 Pcs	£12.60 Each
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EL34-M	£19.20	£21.60	6V6GT-R	£19.20	£21.60
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Smooth Hound Classic Wireless Guitar System

A high-quality yet eminently affordable wireless system that incorporates cable simulation technology. **SIMON BRADLEY** plugs in...

Smooth Hound is the brainchild of Chris Fryer, an engineer who's turned his talents to such disparate items as kidney dialysis machines and domestic gas meters. The Classic is a digital wireless system that works within the 2.4GHz ISM band and offers automated adaptive channel selection amongst its myriad features.

The system comprises a lightweight K2100 receiver that sports two adjustable antennae, is powered by a 9V 150mA supply and features the rather ingenious K1100 transmitter.

The transmitter incorporates an aluminium casing that takes a pair of AAA batteries and a hinged die-cast zinc jack that can move through 270 degrees to fit any electric guitar input. We tested it with a Tele's cup input, as well as the input jacks of a Strat and a Les Paul, and it fitted perfectly. You can also secure the unit flush against your guitar's body by affixing a piece of microsuction tape, included with the system, to the rear of the chassis. It's a rather elegant idea and if you'd prefer to use the receiver as a belt or strap pack, Smooth Hound can also supply a female-to-female Neutrik quarter-inch jack adaptor to allow you to do so. You'll just require a short cable to connect it. Additional transmitters are available for £79, and can be bound to the receiver via a simple set-up process.

The receiver's four-LED bar graphs depict charge and signal strength, and control mode, accessed via the Pro button, allows you to not only fine-tune any latency, but also the length of time it takes for the transmitter to power down during periods of inactivity. Most intriguing are three 'cable' tone settings intended to combat the adverse effect a wireless system can have on your tone.

The system is a doddle to use and the transmitter and receiver simply find each other straight out of the box

In use

With cable tone off, the sound is brighter than using an 18ft Whirlwind Leader lead. All three of our Strat's single coils display heightened treble, with the zing increasing as we up the amp gain; we find the same with our Les Paul's humbuckers. It's not unpleasant, but certainly noticeable.

Scrolling through the cable tone function's virtual lengths, christened 10, 20 and 30-foot, allows us to get our wireless tone in a cable-like ballpark. The settings incrementally increase warmth, and although the changes are subtle they do counteract the system's influence. We didn't need to touch our amp's EQ, and if your rig is anything like ours – two good-quality 25ft cables and a few pedals linked with patch leads – we'd suggest starting with the 20ft setting and taking it from there.

The system is a doddle to use and getting started is a case simply of connecting everything; the transmitter and receiver find each other out of the box. We experienced no noise or interference, and the 200ft range and 15 hours of battery life should be ample.

There are more advanced systems, but if you want to go wireless without any drama whilst retaining your tone, take this dog for a run.

KEY FEATURES

Smooth Hound Classic Wireless Guitar System

- **PRICE** £149
- **DESCRIPTION** Digital wireless system for guitars, including a K1100 transmitter and K2100 receiver, two AAA batteries for the transmitter, and a 9v 150mA PSU for the receiver. Made in England
- **PRICE** £149, additional K1100 receivers available at £79
- **CONTROLS** Pro button on receiver, three four-LED bar graphs that denote different functions, on/off switch on receiver, Axis button on transmitter
- **CONTACT** Smooth Hound Innovations 07976 716958 **www.smoothound-innovations.com**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Cable simulation function
+ Great price
+ Easy to use

- Slightly fiddly battery cover

An impressive yet simple system that'd be practical for any player's foray into a cable-free world, whether on stage or in the living room

8/10

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Sennheiser's flexible **XSW 72** analogue wireless system **£172.50** is well worth a look, as is the **Samson AirLine AF1 £199**, the latter offering a pedal-style receiver. Don't miss **AKG**'s bijou **WMS40** system **£67** or the excellent **Line 6 G30 £165** either.

Burns Bison Bass

With its distinctive double-cutaway horns, the Bison is a truly eye-catching retro bass. **GARETH MORGAN** joins the rodeo...

KEY FEATURES

Burns Bison Bass

- **PRICE** £499, including hard case
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody bass, made in China
- **BUILD** Indonesian nato body, bolt-on hardrock maple neck with 22 medium nickel frets on a rosewood fingerboard; Burns Deluxe tuners; Burns Deluxe bridge; Chrome hardware
- **ELECTRICS** passive with 3x Burns Nu-Sonic pickups
- **CONTROLS** Four-way rotary pickup selector featuring 'split sound', 'bass', 'treble' and 'wild dog' modes, A/B pickup selector, volume and tone controls
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISHES** Black, White (as reviewed)
- **SCALE LENGTH** 864mm/34"
- **NECK WIDTH** 41mm at nut, 55mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 19mm at first fret, 24mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 10mm at nut, 20.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 4.7kg/10.32lbs
- **CONTACT** Burns Guitars 020 8783 3638 **www.burnsguitars.com**

Burns Guitars has been with us since Jim Burns founded the company in 1959, and is currently under the proprietorship of Barry Gibson, who resurrected the brand in the early 90s. Since the turn of the century, we've been treated to a variety of retro corkers, all with superb attention to detail, and this month the reissued Bison Bass comes under our reviewing spotlight.

Part of the Club Series, the Chinese-made Bison is most notable in a visual sense for the oversized offset horns that dominate its vista. Introduced back in 1962, the original Bison Bass was an honest attempt at creating something different, but even now it won't be to all tastes. We say vive la différence. Despite its pointy appearance, the chamfered Indonesian nato body is comfortable whether playing standing or seated. The maple neck is a bolt-on affair, framed by white binding strips, while the 'batwing' headstock bears an acrylic logo badge and four Burns Deluxe tuners in chrome, with excellent recessing for break-angle purposes. You get 22 medium nickel frets on the rosewood fingerboard, along with standard pearloid dot markers, although there are three at the 12th fret, and the bridge unit is another Burns Deluxe model.

Aside from the 'horny' appearance, the Bison's face is dominated by an extensive two-ply black/white scratchplate, which is also home to three Burns Tri-Sonic pickups and four knurled chrome controls. Closest to the bridge, you'll find volume and, as it's passive, master tone controls; the knob with four marked positions is a pickup selector for the neck and bridge Tri-Sonics and the A/B dial adds or solos the middle pickup. The Wild Dog setting is basically the bridge pickup with extra bite (via a sneaky added capacitor) in position A or, more mundanely, bridge and middle in out-of-phase mode on B.

The Bison is, and always has been, most notable in a visual sense for the oversized horns that dominate its vista

In use

Rolling the tone to maximum, we start our tonal odyssey at 'split sound' on the rotary, select A (bridge and neck in series) and are regaled with a bright and punchy tone with plenty of high-mid honk across the neck. It's probably a little too nasal, but this can be moderated by cutting the tone.

The B version (adds middle pickup) is smoother, almost Warwick-like, with more obvious bass end. Set to 'bass', the sound is fat and smooth but well defined with plenty of acoustic life, although it's spoiled by introducing the middle pickup's honkiness, as it kills the raspy edge of low notes. 'Treble' sees the Bison in gurglier mode with a barking E string and snappier highs. Selecting B solos the middle pickup; the sound is wider with more rounded definition and softer and more even highs.

If you're expecting something spectacular from 'wild dog' mode you'll be disappointed, but the brighter, more punchy sound is a lot of fun and justifies its existence. There's a pleasing growl from the E string, married to neck-wide tight definition without brittleness and more natural-sounding highs. The final variation here is neck and middle out of phase which, similarly to previous B variations, stifles highs, allowing the honky high-mid element to come through.

Guitar VERDICT

+ Highly individual styling
+ Myriad tonal variations for a passive bass
+ Excellent build quality and attention to detail

- Oversized horns won't be everyone's cup of tea
- A fraction on the heavy side
- A little bit too much high honk on some settings

The Bison is more versatile than you'd expect, with plenty of good, practical sounds on board – and it'll definitely get you noticed at any gig

8/10

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE... If you fancy a more conservative-looking Burns, try the **Nu-Sonic Bass £799**, a twin-pickup, passive, short-scale bass with smaller proportions that sounds surprisingly good. Another bass strong on visuals is the **Italia Imola GP £879**, but it also feels great to play and sounds brilliant. Or there's Brian May's **BMG Bass £749**. It's another quirky short-scale offering and surprisingly classy in the meat-and-potatoes groove department.

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Fender Paramount PM-2 Deluxe
Parlour guitar. All Solid Indian Rosewood back & Sides. Sitka Spruce top. Vintage appointments. Scalloped X bracing. C shaped neck. Hard Case Included.

Fender Paramount PM-3 Std
Standard Triple 0. All Solid Mahogany back & sides, Sitka Spruce top. Vintage appointments. Scalloped X Bracing. C shaped Neck. Hard Case Included.

Martin Dreadnought Junior
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Fender American Stratocaster
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Fender 'The Edge' Stratocaster
New for 2016! Featuring a pair of Custom Shop Fat 50s Single coil pickups (flat staggered polepieces). DiMarzio FS-1 pickup in the bridge position. With Hard Case.

Gretsch G6115T Red Betty
Limited Edition. With center block. Junior Size. '50s inspired 2-tone top finish with matching headstock. P90 and Filtertron humbucker. Includes Hard Case.

Fender American Pure Vintage '59
Stratocaster. Finished in Sunburst. Rosewood Slab fingerboard. Three-ply mint pickguard. Alder body. Vintage accurate pickups. Includes Hard Case.

Fender Classic Player Jaguar
Special HH. With modern improvements including Hotter pickups, cut switch, adjusto-matic bridge, 9.5" fingerboard, neck pocket with increased back-angle for

Paul Reed Smith 2007 Custom 22
Finished in Tobacco Sunburst. Made in USA. Original style bird inlays. Dragon Two Humbuckers. Locking Machine Heads. Nickel hardware. Includes Hard Case.

Collings 2002 OM3H
Spruce Top with Rosewood back and sides. Herringbone binding. Waverly Machine Heads. 1-3/4" nut width. Includes a Deluxe Hard Case.

Fender 1999 Custom Shop Relic
'64 Reissue Jazz Bass. Made in 1999. Some of the best Relic-ing we have seen. All original. Lovely! Comes with a Fender Deluxe Hard Case.

Rickenbacker 1978 4003 Fireglo
Good condition. Made in 1978. Fantastic sound and character. Low action. Very collectable. With a Non original hard case.

Martin 00015-M Electro-Acoustic
Great condition. Has a built in pickup system. All mahogany. Plays and sounds great! Comes with a Hard Case.

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Six of the best

The home recording revolution has made it possible to get pro-level results on a shoestring budget. Here are some great options to get you started

Focusrite Scarlett 2i2

PRICE £99 **CONTACT** www.focusrite.com

In order to connect your guitar to a computer or mobile device for recording, you're going to need an audio interface, and Focusrite makes some of the best affordable options on the market. The Scarlett 2i2 has two dual-purpose XLR/jack inputs with high-quality mic preamps, so you can record two guitars or mics simultaneously. It's compatible with Windows and Mac, comes with Ableton Live and is housed in an attractive red anodised aluminium chassis.

If you're looking for a simple method of recording at home or on location, the AT2020USBi is an excellent plug-and-play solution

AT2020USBi Cardioid Condenser USB Microphone

PRICE £169 **CONTACT** www.audio-technica.com

If you're looking for a more simple method of recording at home or while out on location, Audio-Technica's AT2020USBi is an excellent plug-and-play solution. It connects directly to your laptop, tablet or phone, negating the need for an interface, and is based on the design of the company's celebrated AT2020 cardioid condenser mic with similarly high-quality sound and impressive clarity. It features a headphone output for monitoring, fader to balance the mic signal with the playback level, tripod desk stand and three-metre USB cable.

KRK KNS 8400 Studio Headphones

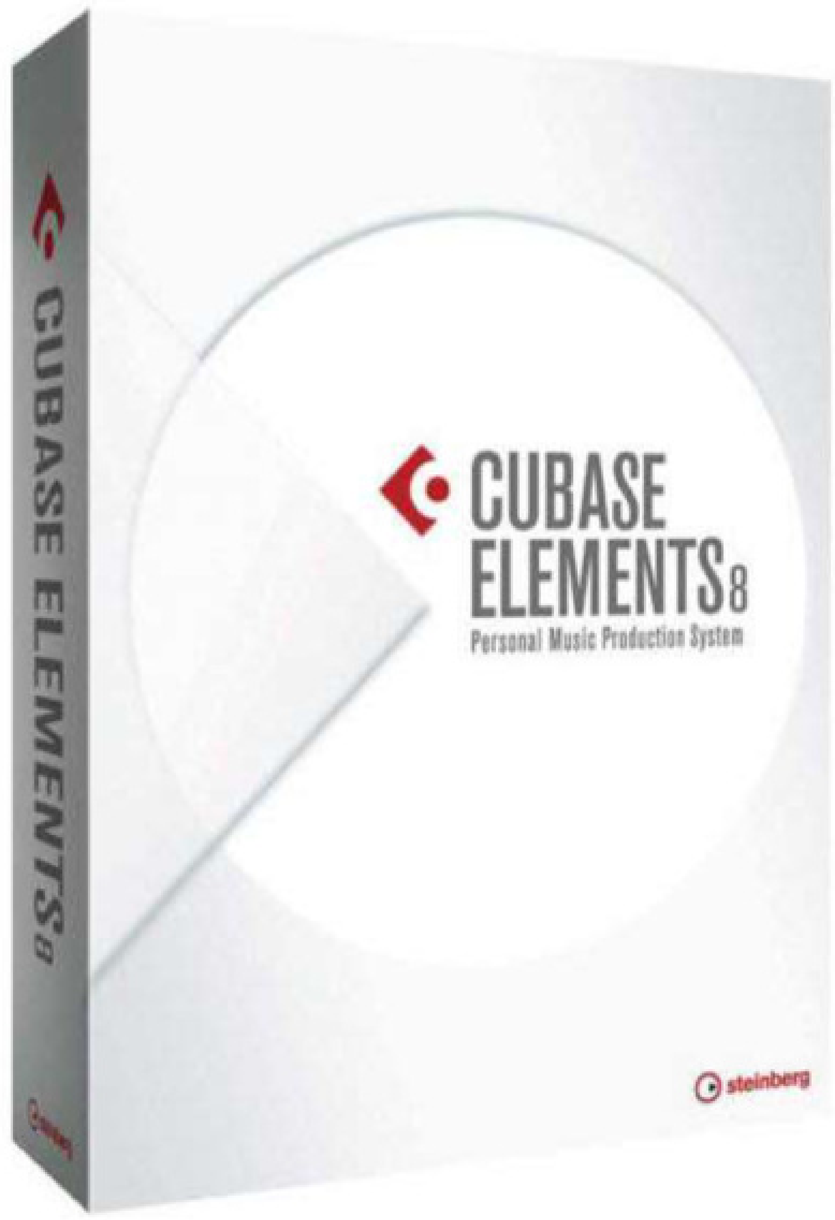
PRICE £99 **CONTACT** www.krksys.com

When it comes to recording, mixing and mastering your compositions, a decent set of headphones or monitor speakers will prove absolutely essential – and KRK is a company that makes both. The KNS 8400s offer a wide frequency response and accurate sound with low distortion and an extended LF response. They're also light in weight with memory foam ear and head cushions to ensure they won't become uncomfortable during long mixing sessions. The 8400s will enable you to pick out details you didn't realise were present in your mixes, and come at a price that makes them one of the most attractive options on the market for entry-level studio headphones.

Cubase Elements 8

PRICE £49 **CONTACT** www.steinberg.net

Digital Audio Workstations are at the very core of a home recording set-up. Apart from allowing you to record and edit multiple tracks on your computer, they can also be used for mixing and mastering your work. Cubase, along with the likes of Logic and Pro Tools, has long been one of the leading DAWs, and the Elements version delivers a range of the full programme's features at a price that won't break your home studio budget. It will support up to 48 simultaneous audio or 64 MIDI tracks, includes a series of virtual instruments for adding drum, synth or orchestral parts to your projects, and even has a guitar amp and speaker sim.



Positive Grid's BIAS FX enables you to emulate the sounds of a whole world of amps, cabs, stompboxes and rack effects on your computer or mobile device

iRig Pro Duo

PRICE £149 **CONTACT** www.ikmultimedia.com

IK Multimedia makes a range of highly portable interfaces that are simple to use and capable of professional-sounding results for people who want to record on the move, using a laptop, mobile phone or tablet. The iRig Pro Duo is one of the best and works with Mac, PC and mobile platforms. It fits in the palm of your hand and runs from either two AA batteries or via USB from whatever device it's connected to. It has two 1/4-inch mic/line inputs, a pair of outputs and a headphone socket as well as switches for 48-volt phantom power for connecting condenser mics. IK Multimedia also makes the AmpliTube modelling software, which when paired with the iRig enables you to plug in and record through a studio-quality set-up of virtual amps and effects wherever you are.

Positive Grid BIAS FX

PRICE $69 **CONTACT** www.positivegrid.com

Positive Grid's BIAS FX is a cross-platform amp and effects simulator that enables you to emulate the sounds of a whole world of amps, cabs, stompboxes and rack effects on your computer or mobile device. The Desktop version provides 12 amps and 30 effects, while Professional ups that quota to 32 amps and 52 effects, plus 10 studio rack processors. The ToneCloud feature allows you to share your virtual pedalboard creations online and download boards designed by other users and professional players. BIAS FX can operate as a plug-in to your DAW or standalone and the company also produces the BIAS Amp program, which offers in-depth amp editing and building options, allowing you to swap tubes, preamps, transformers, tone stacks, cabs and mics to get your ideal sound.

SID BISHOP

During his tenure at the Top Gear store on London's iconic Denmark Street, Sid dealt with multitudes of famous musicians. Having been around, in his own words "before vintage guitars were invented", Sid got up close and personal with thousands of drool-worthy instruments. Luckily for us, he's willing to share his stories and wisdom about all things guitar-related.

AND IF YOU NEED A GUIDING HAND...

Raw talent alone will only get your band so far. Sooner or later you'll need to enlist the services of a manager. **SID BISHOP** talks us through the basic principles...

Now that your band have exhausted all the potential gigs at your local pubs and other dives, you'll have realised how essential the services of an efficient, honest and reliable booking agent would be. Once recruited, and after a few months of travelling ever further afield as a result of his sterling efforts, you might decide that your band is on the cusp of some tangible success, and you may have a firm conviction that said band has reached the point where you are able to break nationally. Your booking agent can take you only so far along this path, and to advance further you'll need something more – in other words, a full-time manager.

A manager will do a great deal more for you than a booking agent can. He or she will provide in-depth guidance – and this could take the form of moulding an image, giving you feedback on your live performances and getting you more high-profile, lucrative work. They might even land you a support slot for a bigger name on a national or international tour, which could really put you on the map. Your manager will also undertake the task of arranging all your tour dates, photocalls, TV and interviews, hotel accommodation and transport, and assemble a road crew once this becomes necessary, leaving you to concentrate on what you do best – the music. That's a lot of work, and in all probability they will also have several other bands signed up.

You don't need me to tell you to weed out the bad guys. The business is littered with horror stories

You may at some point be approached directly by a person who will offer their management services, and while some may turn out to be nothing more than get-rich-quick merchants, others will have a genuine belief in the band, know the business inside out, and will nurture you – hopefully to a point when you will all make a lot of money, including your manager, who will of course deduct his chunk. You don't need me to tell you that you have to weed out the bad guys, and this business is littered with horror stories about 'managers' who have done little other than rip off their bands and promptly disappear with all the money. That's why you might also be wise to get a lawyer, and then another lawyer to keep an eye on the first lawyer (thanks to Billy Joel for that quote). You could, of course, approach a potential manager yourself, but caution must always be your watchword – and never sign anything without speaking to one of those lawyers.

It is unlikely that any commercially successful band would have achieved as much without a dedicated manager, even the greatest band in the history of pop – The Beatles – benefiting from the guiding hand of Brian Epstein. Epstein saw their potential and helped to develop it, shaping their clothing and haircuts, making them bow at the end of each three-minute song, even planning where they stood on stage. Would Jimi Hendrix have risen to the heights he did had he not been spotted by Chas Chandler? We can only speculate.

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Vintage BENCH TEST

'63 FENDER STRATOCASTER

An original custom colour Sea Foam Green Strat is many a Fender collector's holy grail. **HUW PRICE** finds there's more to this guitar than just a rare finish

It's always a thrill to play any pre-CBS Stratocaster, but largely intact examples with an original finish present an even bigger treat. The fact that our subject for this bench test left the factory complete with a custom colour Foam Green paint job means we really are dealing with something very special.

Granted, custom colour Strats don't sound any better, but they do tend to command a premium with collectors and investors. Rarity counts, and Sea Foam (also referred to simply as Foam) Green is about as rare as it gets.

Custom colour Strats don't sound any better, but rarity counts and Foam Green is about as rare as it gets

Try doing an image search for a vintage Strat with this finish, and all you'll turn up are some relics and a handful of re-fins. There are rumours that Rick Nielsen of Cheap Trick once owned an example, and Kirk Hammett appeared with one in the video for *I Disappear*, but... that's about it.

This vintage lovely has a neck date of October 1963, along with a very early 'L' series serial number. The body has the later-style pickguard screw hole – shifted closer to the middle pickup – but the grounding is done in the earlier style, with the spring claw soldered directly to the output jack.

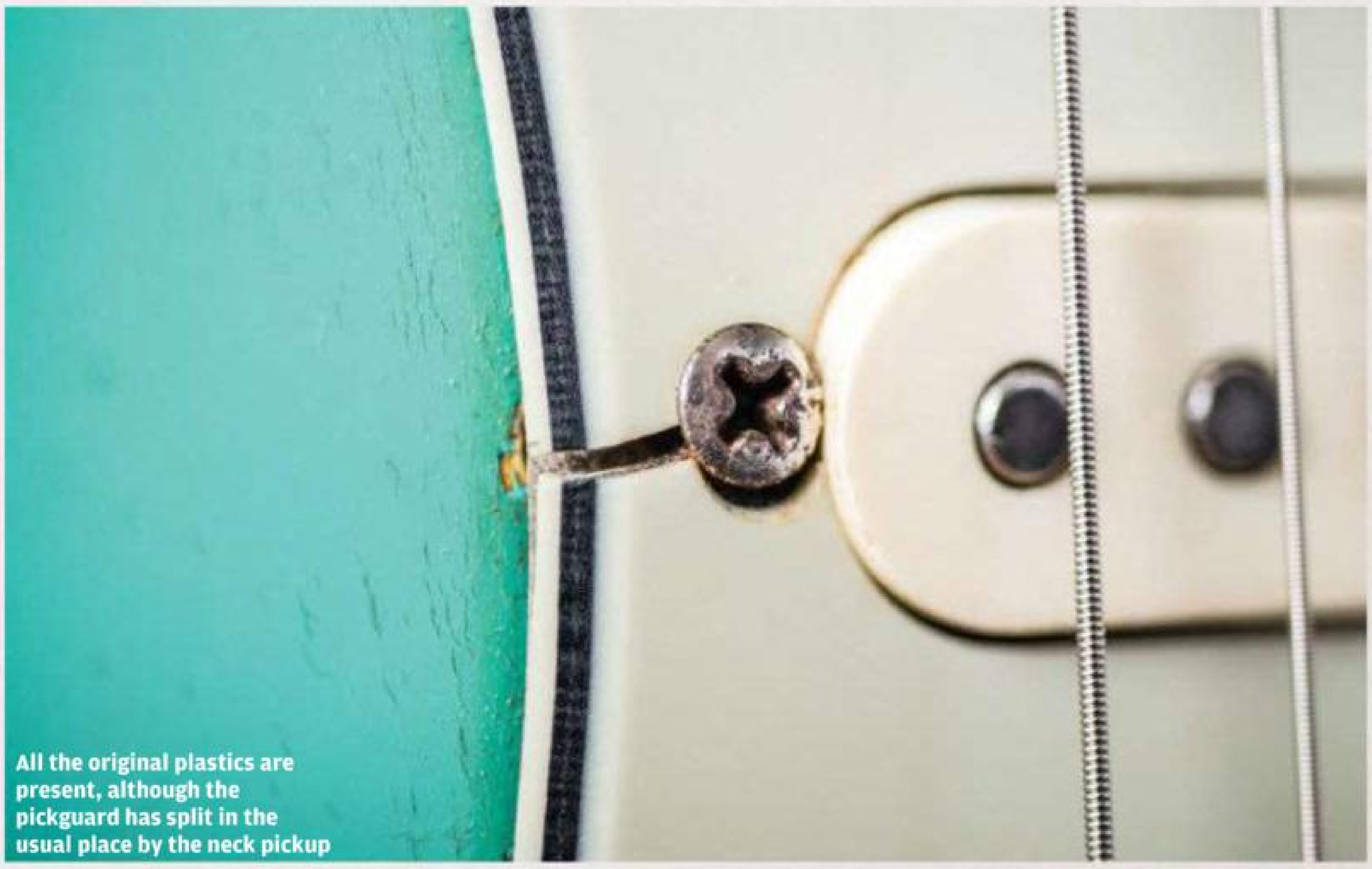
The wires are fairly short, so it's tricky to flip the pickguard over. Perhaps the famously frugal Leo Fender was cutting back on cable costs. As befits an unmolested vintage Fender, the cloth cable looks fresh and clean.

The originality of the finish is the crucial issue. I can report that the body is not branded or stamped to indicate that it's a factory refinish. A paint stick was used for spraying, and somebody applied masking tape diagonally in the neck pocket to ensure the factory 'OK' stamp wasn't painted over. Another strip of masking tape was placed in the >

KEY FEATURES

'63 Fender Foam Green Stratocaster

- **SCALE LENGTH** 650mm/25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 52mm at 12th fret
- **DEPTH OF NECK** 20mm at first fret, 22mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.5mm at nut, 54.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.65kg
- **FINISH** Foam Green over sunburst
- **CONTACT** Vintage Guitar Boutique 0207 729 9186 www.vintageguitarboutique.com



All the original plastics are present, although the pickguard has split in the usual place by the neck pickup

Original pre-CBS 'ashtray' bridge covers such as this have usually gone missing

VOLUME
TONE

middle pickup rout, but there are no body markings in that area.

There's an earlier finish under the Foam Green, and it can only be sunburst. Some areas of green around the sides have rubbed away to reveal black lacquer. You can also see the layers all the way down to the wood where the finish is chipped, and it's telling that the black can be seen only towards the edges of the body.

Chips nearer the centre reveal clear coats with a yellow tint and traces of a reddish lacquer can be seen around the screw holes under the neck plate and inside the jack cavity. This does seem consistent with a three-tone sunburst.

There is no doubt that the Foam Green was professionally applied and it once looked pristine. Had it been applied over a worn and damaged sunburst, there is no way it would look as good as it does, and if the body had been sanded it's unlikely so much of the yellow would have survived. The lacquer retains much of its glossiness, but has acquired an attractive and natural patina consistent with playwear.

Above **The neck date confirms this guitar was built in October 1963**

Amateur attempts to touch up the finish have been made in places and the repair paint is a decent colour match, but it was applied by brush rather than drop filled. Under a black light, everything on this guitar looks right – except for the touch-ups.

It's well documented that Fender would spray over imperfect sunburst bodies to fulfil custom colour orders, in effect making the sunburst a base coat. Close examination and gut instinct lead me to conclude that this Strat was Foam Green when it left the Fender factory.

It's well documented that Fender would spray over imperfect sunburst bodies to fulfil custom colour orders

Apparently, this one spent most of its life in New Zealand, and it has a very original feel. Even the 'ashtray' bridge cover and tremolo arm are still with the guitar. All the original plastics are present too, and the pickguard is in pretty good nick, but it's split in the usual place north of the neck pickup screw. There has been a fair amount of shrinkage, which has pulled the pickups out of shape somewhat.

Looking underneath, the shield plate has been crudely reshaped at the end of the treble horn. This could be the the work of the previous owner, >

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who may have been concerned that the plate was beginning to show due to guard shrinkage. The guard shows little evidence of truss-rod adjustments, and the scoop is rounded and smooth.

The frets had to be replaced because the wear was so bad. The current owner chose jumbos, which are not original spec, but hey, if you're pulling out factory frets you may as well replace them with ones you like. Fortunately, the beautiful veneer board, with its lighter than usual Brazilian rosewood, retains most of its depth. The thickness of the veneer would originally have been about 3/32".

This has to be one of the most naturally powerful vintage Stratocasters I've ever played

Those who have played original early-60s Strats, or many of the reissues and replicas, may have a fairly clear idea of a typical neck profile for this era. Most likely, it would be something skinny around the first few frets, which thickens out to a palm filling roundness near the 12th fret. This neck feels nothing like that.

The fairly chunky neck has a full roundness all along, so the increase in depth is less noticeable as you move up towards the body. Acoustically, it's a fairly lively example, but there's nothing to hint at what happens when you plug it in.

This is one of the most naturally powerful vintage Strats I've ever played. The frequency range is extreme, with massive bass weight and sparkling yet smooth highs. It will push most valve amps into overdrive quite quickly, but here's the thing – none of the pickups is wound hotter than 5.8k. The bridge pickup is about as good as they get. It more than holds its own with the others, producing a spanky midrange with ample low-end weight. There's also a spectacular jangle on top that never veers towards excessive brightness.

The middle position is where it's at for rhythm duties, sounding well balanced with a throaty quack. The neck tone is absolutely huge, but as with both of the other pickups there's always inherent clarity, definition and punch regardless of overdrive levels.

Some 60s rosewood board Strats are associated with 'glassiness', but this one doesn't go there. This Strat is not only a collector's dream, it's also a muscular tone monster that does the big, clear, sustaining SRV thing to a tee.

Above left **Some areas of green around the sides have rubbed away to reveal black lacquer, most likely from a three-tone sunburst beneath**
Right **The headstock wears the Pre-CBS 'spaghetti' Fender logo**

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BOB 'ANGELO' SAWYER

The former Iron Maiden guitarist is a veteran blues-rock player who has been in a plethora of bands. **Lars Mullen** takes a look at his collection

"There have been a few," laughs former Iron Maiden guitarist Bob Sawyer when asked how many bands he's been in. "I've just finished compiling a book which includes a lot of unseen photos of my time in Iron Maiden from December '76 to July '77, and in Praying Mantis, so I'm on the look-out for a publisher.

"I'm not afraid to say my feet are cemented between '66 and '75, I feel proud to have been part of that era. Growing up in Enfield in North London, I was the right age to see all the great bands, some in their infancy, like King Crimson, Pink Floyd, Gravy Train, May Blitz, Man, The Pretty Things, The Pink Fairies and Trapeze. Oh, yes, and Rory Gallagher in Taste, Jethro Tull, John Mayall and Led Zeppelin for the equivalent of 27.5p!

"I'm not afraid to say my feet are cemented between '66 and '75, I feel proud to have been part of that era"

"When I was 15, I was gigging flat-out in youth bands, playing all the mod material from bands like The Who, The Small Faces and Geno Washington. I went to the gig Sid Bishop talked about in *Guitar & Bass* [November, 2015], where his band The Deviants played with Steamhammer and Timebox at Enfield Technical College in January '69. The Enfield Town mob wanted to beat up the hippy bands.

"Iron Maiden were booked to play The Roxy in March '77, which was a big punk stronghold – luckily the gig didn't come off. The punks wouldn't have accepted us, and if they had started spitting at us, it would have got nasty. We were just cocky young upstarts at the time, gigging furiously in London's East End right in the face of punk.

"I was lucky enough to buy a Coral Pink 60s Strat back then, from Top Gear in Denmark Street, where Sid Bishop worked. I can see him now looking very much the rock star with long hair, leather trousers and red velvet jacket!

"I chopped in the Strat, though, at the Orange guitar shop in New Compton Street for 90 quid, added another 90 and got a '72 Gibson Les Paul, which I still have now. It was one of the first reissues and started life as a Goldtop with P-90s. I loved it, but it was only halfway to what I really wanted, which was a flametop – which you couldn't find then. So I had it retopped, which cost 400 quid, far more than it was worth. It plays itself and has been with me in so many bands since, including Iron Maiden, Slow Motion, Nitro Blues, Weapon and Praying Mantis. >

Above **Sawyer with his collection of guitars, amps and pedals**
Opposite page, top left **Gretsch Silver Jet (left), Hofner Galaxy**
Top right **1959 Les Paul Junior**
Centre right **Sawyer with his 1972 Gibson Les Paul**
Bottom left **Hand-painted double-cutaway Vintage guitar (left), maple neck Telecaster (centre), Red T-type with hand-painted scratchplate**
Bottom centre **1962 Gibson Melody Maker**
Bottom right **Close-up detail of Sawyer's maple-neck T-type**

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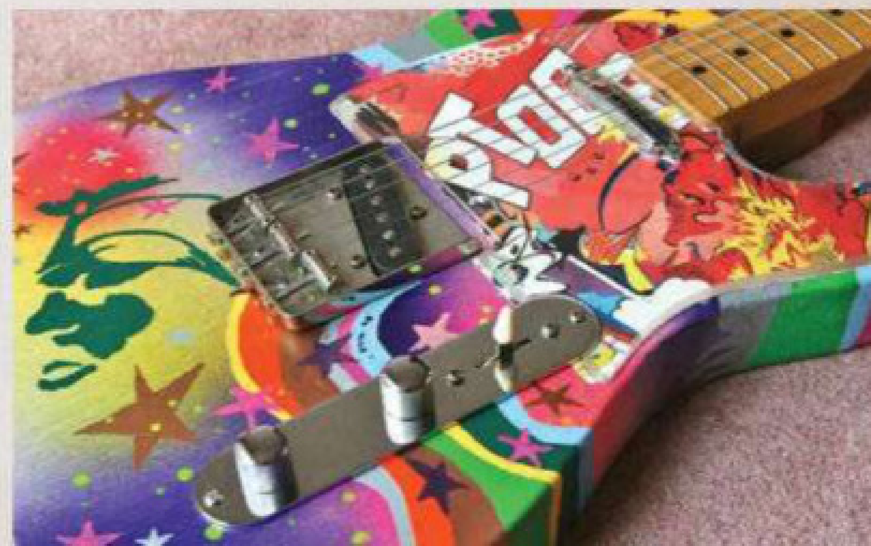

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"Whilst we are on the Les Paul track, my Gretsch Silver Jet, I can honestly say, is the best Les Paul I've ever owned! On paper, it shouldn't work, but the warmth and output from the Filter'Tron pickups far outweighs the Les Paul. The neck pickup is instant Paul Kossoff, especially through my Fender Blues Junior or any of the Marshalls dotted around here, even the transistor models like the MG100DFX combo, which are reliable and sound so good, and the little practice models in red and purple. It's the colour – colour does it for me every time.

"Maybe I need to explain, whilst I have a hard-rock blues reputation, I'm also a total fan of all the prog-rock and psychedelic bands from the late 60s and early 70s. Heaven for me is being locked in my studio with a liquid light projector running, playing guitar with an Ebow whilst hooked up to loopers and echo boxes. I've just released an ambient soundscape album called *Astronomie*, which is quite a departure from the rock 'n' blues that I play live."

Bob turns next to a series of guitars fitting perfectly within this art-based musical culture.

"Well, like I mentioned, it's colours that do it for me," he says. "It started when I first saw Eric Clapton on the front cover of *Beat Instrumental* magazine in October '67, when I was 15. He had his big haircut, buckskin jacket and that amazing, painted SG 'Fool' guitar. I was so besotted with that guitar that I didn't know if I was going for a shit or a haircut. I dreamt for years of owning a similar model, I have an excellent model that echoes all the colourful details made by Vintage, which I play in my band, called Firebird Seven. So it was all an inspiration to harken back to those years with my own customised artwork here. Two of my Teles, for example, have tasted my dab hand with a brush; the body art on the one with the maple neck is my own design, while the scratchplate is painted from the *PTOOF* album by the Deviants, which Sid Bishop is on; while the design on the Fiesta Red Tele scratchplate is inspired by the Pretty Things' 1968 album *S.F. Sorrow*.

"I still can visualise the psychedelic period as if it was yesterday, especially The Pink Fairies and the Hawkwind Christmas party at the Roundhouse in London, December '70. They had white sheets draped from the ceiling with dozens of liquid light 'blob' shows projected over the walls."

"You didn't need drugs," laughs Bob, "it just blew you away. The Pink Fairies were mercilessly loud, with both guitar players using double Simms Watts 200-watt stacks flat-out through an Echoplex, which doubled it all up – and they had two drummers.

"It's colours that do it for me. It started when I first saw Eric Clapton on the cover of Beat Instrumental"

"Staying with vibrant-coloured guitars for a moment, the finishes on two of my Strats are unique, as they have been dipped. I did it myself. It's quite easy, you just need a dustbin full of water, swirl lots of coloured oil-based paint on the top of the water, and plunge the body in and slowly back out. There's a little bit of technique involved but you have your own unique finish, as no two are the same. These are great stage guitars."

Looking up close, we spot a mini toggle switch in the Strat's scratchplates. "Ah yes, that is such a simple but ingenious Strat mod," says Sawyer. "The mini toggle brings in the middle pickup with either the neck or bridge pickup for some awesome fat Strat tones. I'm pretty handy with a soldering iron, so it's an easy mod. I've modified a lot of my guitars and added a few unique, yet simple >

Opposite page, top left **Fender Electric XII (left), 2009 Gibson 335**
Top right **Clarissa bowl back acoustic (left), Gibson Hummingbird**
Bottom left **White Fender Tele (left), relic'd Esquire and improvised B-Bender made from a fork**
Bottom right **Customised Gibson Firebird (left), black reissue SG**
This page, above left **Custom 24 PRS**
Above right **Dip-painted S-types**

Top left **A selection of Sawyer's pedals**
Above left **Scratchplate with toggle switch on hand-painted Strat**
Above right **Fiesta Red Strat with hand-painted scratchplate (left), purple Strat**

versions of some of the more intricate designs out there. I've fitted my own B-Bender to a partscaster T-type made out of a fork from the wife's best dinner service – now she'll know where it went! It's so simple, yet it works perfectly.

"One of my first encounters with a Tele live was seeing Roy Buchanan on the same bill as a load of hairy Les Paul players with rows of stacks. Roy came on with a Tele and a little baby Fender amp, leaned into the amp and got this amazing sustain and pinched harmonics. All the players were in the wings watching with their tongues on the floor. It was a masterclass in technique and good taste."

Sawyer is also a Gibson SG fan, but they have to be of a certain pedigree. "I have a black reissue Gibson SG, which for me ticks all the boxes for every reason you should love an SG," he says. "My fetish is for the Series 1 SG, nothing else will do. None of those double-sided big scratchplate jobs, it has to be Series 1 all the way, which includes the body chamfering with the narrow horns... nothing else will do, trainspotting doesn't come near it!

"My fetish is for the Series 1 SG, nothing else will do. None of those big scratchplate jobs"

"I've replaced the '57 Special humbuckers with Warman units, which have a more punchy midrange and a beefy 14k output. It also has the old-style Portuguese 'hand-pump' side-action Vibrola. I love a Vibrola, I really think they are one of the unsung vibrato designs. I've even replaced the Bigsby with one on my 2009 Gibson 335, which I gig a lot, hence the gold is wearing off pretty fast. I like that, I like a guitar to look like lived in. I don't think you can beat up a Tele or a Strat enough, though, it just works on a Fender, unlike a Gibson, Gretsch or PRS. I've got a Custom 24 PRS finished in Ocean Turquoise, one of my main studio guitars.

"Natural wear is good, though, like my '59 Les Paul Junior, which has all the lacquer cracks and has lost the rich red over the years, but what a guitar – think Leslie West. As a kid, that guy was a total inspiration for me. I've another great working guitar, the little '62 Gibson Melody Maker, sounding even better as I've upgraded the pickups with Red Lace Sensors. I bought this on a whim after seeing the guitarist in May Blitz play his through a 200-watt Hiwatt stack in '70. He also had a Squall pedal, probably the first multi-effects pedal, which was basically a wah with hurricane, surf and siren sounds built in. The Sweet used the siren at the beginning of *Blockbuster*. I have the Shin-ei version, it's a killer device – not for the faint-hearted.

"The whole tone concept, though, is subjective, everyone's ears are different, I might not like what someone else thinks is a great tone and vice-versa. I just know what I want from a guitar and amp after all these years.

"That also works with the playability for me. I've always liked the look and style of the classic Rickenbacker 12-string, for instance, but just couldn't get on with the narrow neck design, so I eventually opted for a Fender Electric XII dating from '66. The tones are amazing, a lot of players say it's the best electric 12 ever made, although the Rick has the more popular edge, used by the likes Of Roger McGuinn, George Harrison and Tom Petty.

"I love all the posters, bands, guitars and music from the late 60s, early 70s, and I can't see it changing in the foreseeable future," Sawyer chuckles. "I actually have the same Hofner Galaxy that so many 60s players drooled over in the shop window, as we couldn't afford the red Strat. That's another classic 60s guitar story."

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All about... Telecaster neck pickups

Compared to hallowed Stratocaster units, Tele neck pickups are often maligned, but if yours doesn't cut it there are plenty of mods and upgrade options on the market, as **HUW PRICE** explains

Some have argued that the Tele neck pickup was an afterthought. The single-pickup Esquire pre-dated the Broadcaster, and most of the prototypes that survive have only bridge pickups. This seems to indicate that the neck pickup was added late in the design process. Other guitars of the era had two pickups, so maybe Fender felt compelled to do the same.

Judging by the wide coil and the exposed slugs, the neck pickup on the famous red prototype looks more like a lap steel pickup than the unit Fender eventually designed for the Broadcaster. It probably sounded pretty fantastic. Instead, Fender came up with a much smaller pickup with a narrower coil and a plated metal cover.

It also decided to screw the pickup onto the body rather than suspend it from the pickguard, as it subsequently did on the Stratocaster. The reasons for this were probably aesthetic rather than technical – much like the 'ashtray' bridge cover that concealed the bridge parts and the pickup.

Unlike the bridge pickup, Tele neck pickup specs remained fairly consistent. Since the dimensions were tight, Fender used thinner 43 AWG wire so it could get enough turns onto the bobbin. The magnets might have changed from alnico 3 to alnico 5, but they were always flat rather than staggered. The change from wax potting to lacquer dipping occurred around 1967.

It's probably fair to say that Tele neck pickups are not universally admired. Even hardcore Tele players occasionally express some ambivalence towards the tone upgrade, and many have felt compelled to replace them with other pickups.

Is there something fundamentally wrong with the Tele neck pickup's voicing, or is it just a big misunderstanding? To answer that, we need to take a closer look at the way they're made and how the components and wiring influence the sound.

Judged by its cover

Most of us will be aware of PAF lore, which holds that Gibson-style humbuckers sound different with their covers removed. The same is true for Tele neck pickups, where the cover also rolls back some of the treble response and perceived loudness.

In a sense, this compounds the issues caused by the Tele neck's small and squat coil shape – namely woolly and soft tone. However, none of this would have been too much of an issue when you consider the way in which Fender's original wiring scheme for the Tele was derived from the Esquire's.

Is there something wrong with the Tele neck pickup's voicing, or is it just a big misunderstanding?

Tele neck pickups have been a problem area for guitarists since the first Broadcasters were produced, with the sound proving too dark and 'woolly' for many tastes. Happily, the picture these days is much more rosy

Although it had only one pickup, the Esquire's three-way switch provided three distinct sounds. Position one bypassed the tone control, position two re-engaged the tone control and position three activated a pre-set treble roll-off for a very dark sound. Fender referred to this as the 'bass preset', and it was designed for guitarists to emulate a bass tone in the years before the electric bass.

When the neck pickup was added, positions one and two selected the bridge and neck pickups respectively – both with the tone control engaged. Leo Fender was very fond of the 'bass preset', so it was retained in position three. In 1952, it become even bassier when Fender swapped over to a 0.1uF capacitor. The classic Tele tone with both pickups engaged wasn't actually a stock feature.

Almost from the beginning, players rewired their Tele controls for neck/both/bridge with master volume and tone. Despite the circuit's unpopularity, and the phenomenal success of the electric bass, Fender persisted with the original Tele control wiring until 1967.

The 'Leo got it right the first time' mantra would be more accurate and believable if it was qualified with a strategically inserted 'sometimes'. Once players started hearing how great Stratocaster neck pickups

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sounded, it would have been easy enough for Fender to upgrade the Tele neck pickup and re-configure the controls. Although it would tinker around with minor stuff, Fender always seemed more focused on developing new models than optimising and upgrading old ones.

It's certainly possible to get a really good sound out of a Tele neck pickup, but part of the issue lies in the tonal contrast between the neck and bridge.

Players have always modified guitars, and swapping Tele neck pickups for something entirely different is perhaps the most common mod

Typically, a Tele bridge pickup is as bright as the neck is dark, so if you dial in your amp to sound good with your bridge pickup, the neck will inevitably sound muffled. Set your amp for a clear and articulate neck pickup tone and the bridge pickup will almost certainly sound painfully bright.

Stock solutions

There are a couple of simple and free modifications that can bring out the best from a Tele neck pickup. Most people blame the cover for the lack of clarity, so you can improve things by snipping the little wire that connects the cover to ground. The difference won't be dramatic but you should hear it. Unfortunately, you'll get a slight buzzing sound if you inadvertently touch the cover.

The composition of the cover makes a difference, too. For minimum treble roll-off, it's best to have a thin nickel silver cover. Thick brass covers are a bad idea, unless dull is your thing – nickel silver replacements are available.

To really open out your tone, try removing the cover completely. Modern pickups may have tape wrapped around the coil for protection, but vintage-style pickups are likely to have exposed coils. If you do decide to go topless, so to speak, have a pickup repairer wrap an exposed coil to prevent damage.

The final thing to consider when ordering a new set of Tele pickups is combining alnico 5 slugs in the neck with alnico 3 in the bridge. You could also request 43 AWG wire for the bridge pickup, along with flat slugs for an even frequency response with fuller bass. Hang on... it seems Leo Fender did something right from the get-go after all.

Sticking your neck out

Players have always modified guitars, and swapping Tele neck pickups for something entirely different is perhaps the most common modification of all. Although Keith Richards' humbuckered Micawber is the most famous example, Sinatra and Elvis guitarist Bob Bain is known to have installed a PAF in his '53 Tele as early as 1957. It's the guitar he played on Henry Mancini's *Peter Gunn* theme.

In fact, it was such a popular mod that even Fender got in on the act. In 1972, the company launched the Telecaster Custom, including a Wide Range humbucker designed by Seth Lover, who also came up with the design for Gibson's original PAF.

All-round bad-ass Danny Gatton favoured a Charlie Christian-style pickup before he started using Bardens, and country virtuoso Clarence White used a '54 Strat pickup in his Tele's neck position. Mini humbuckers sound incredible, too, as Fender demonstrated with its outstanding '52 Hot Rod Telecaster model.

These days, Filter'Trons and Gold Foils are popular and P-90s also work a treat. There are even alternatives that are voiced to sound like P-90s, Charlie Christans and so forth that will drop in without the need for routing the body. The bottom line is that everything seems to work pretty well in the neck position of a Tele – including the original pickup. Ultimately, it's just a matter of tonal taste.

BUYER'S GUIDE

If all you want is a vintage replica, the choice is endless. Since vintage Tele neck pickups have never changed that much and there wasn't really a golden era, here's a selection of drop-in neck pickup alternatives for simple and reversible mods.

MCNELLY T-BAR £79

Although the coil is taller and skinnier than a regular P-90's, chunky ceramic magnets sit beneath the 43 AWG coils and height-adjustable polepieces. This pickup captures much of the P-90's rounded and flutey quality and chords chime without sounding trebly.

FENDER CUSTOM SHOP TWISTED TELE £165 PER SET (PRICE INCLUDES BRIDGE UNIT)

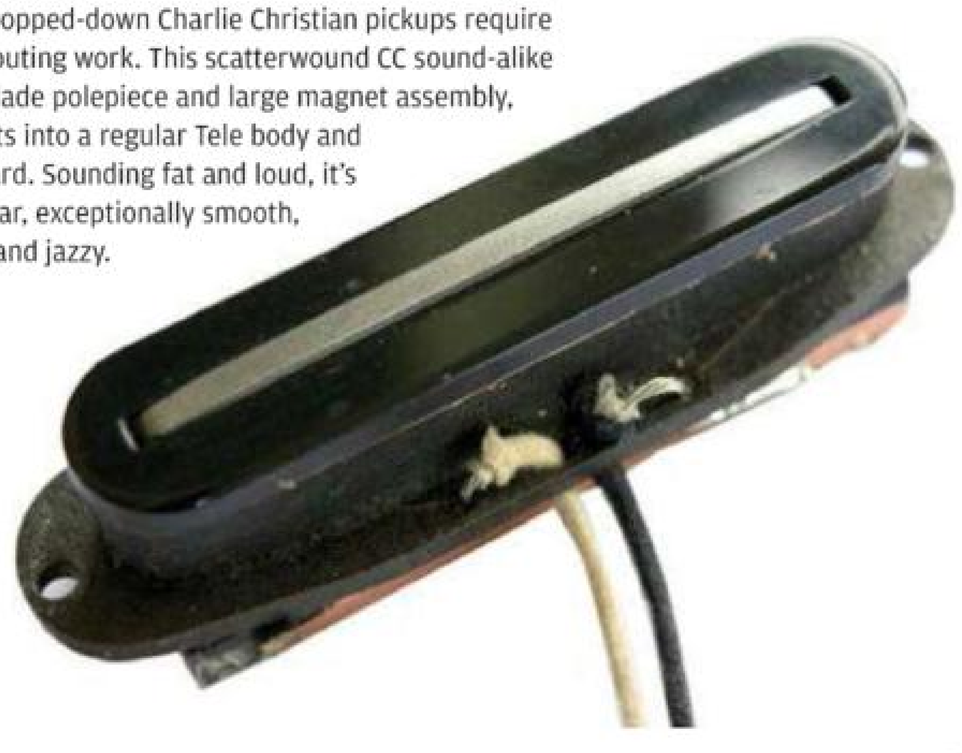
Fender's own solution to getting Strat-like clarity from a Telecaster neck pickup involves a taller bobbin, alnico 5 magnets, 42 AWG wire and a nickel silver cover. It's a popular choice on Custom Shop guitars.

TV JONES T-STYLE $125

Brand new at Winter NAMM 2016, Gretsch pickup guru TV Jones has just released a set that's a hybrid of Tele and 50s-style DeArmond single coils. This one's wound to 7.32K and it's designed to work with regular Fender pots and caps.

VINTAGE VIBE VT-N-BL $99

Even chopped-down Charlie Christian pickups require some routing work. This scatterwound CC sound-alike has a blade polepiece and large magnet assembly, but it fits into a regular Tele body and pickguard. Sounding fat and loud, it's also clear, exceptionally smooth, woody and jazzy.



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Chord Clinic

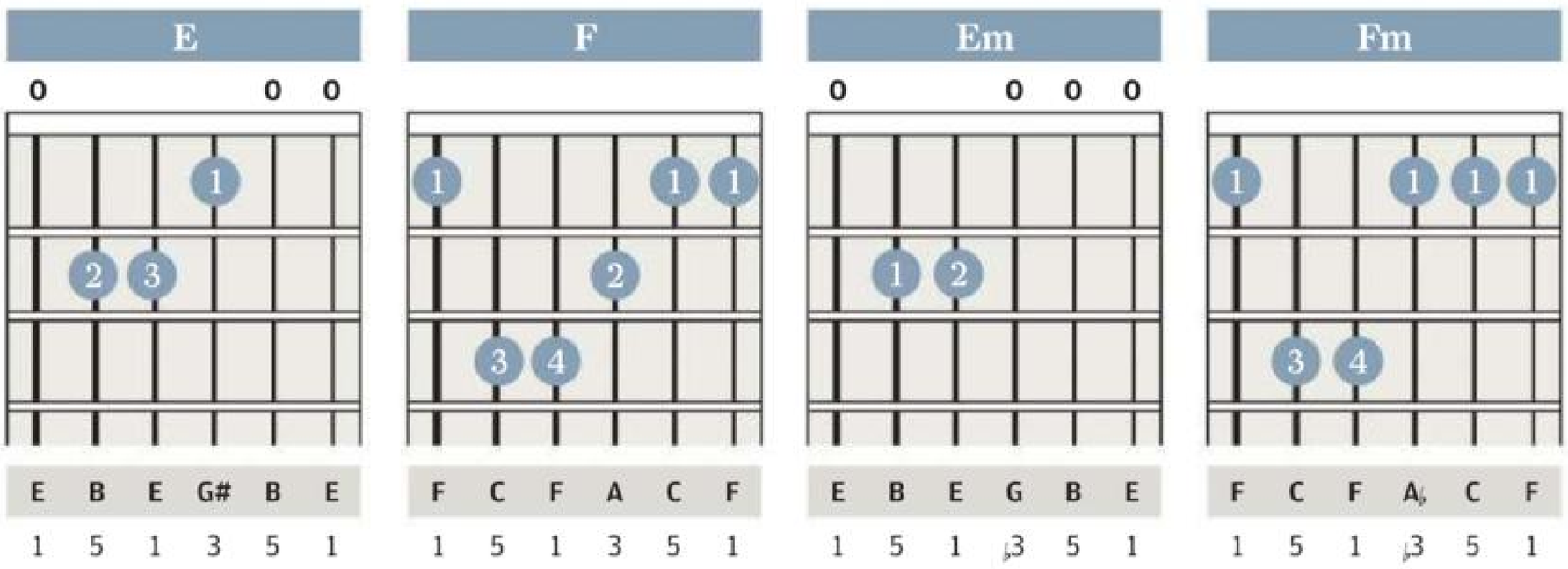
Barre chords are an incredibly useful tool, opening up the fretboard and making it possible to move simple shapes to multiple positions, but they can be tricky to master. **ROD FOGG** shows you how to raise the barre...

This month's Chord Clinic gets to grips with bar or barre chords. I'm going to stick to using barre in this article to distinguish it from the other use of the word bar, as in 'four beats in a bar'. Barre chords involve laying finger one of your fretting hand across the fingerboard, holding down all six (or sometimes fewer) strings. They are incredibly useful in that once you've learnt a shape you can usually play it at every fret. The problem is that they are not easy to execute and, for most guitarists, the transition from open-string chords to barre chords is something of a struggle. But read on, as there might be alternatives that are easier to play – and sound better too.

Sixth-string roots (Fig 1)

Figure 1 begins with the familiar open E chord, followed by the F chord that is essentially the same shape, but with every note moved up one fret. The barre in this F major chord simply does the job that the nut did for the open strings in the E major chord. Because there are no open strings in the barre chord, you can play it at every fret. It will take its name from the note which is under the barre on the sixth string or first string, or under the fourth finger on the D string. If you don't know them, you should at least learn the note names on the sixth string, and you will be able to play all 12 major chords using this one shape. Pick the chord one note at a time to make sure all the notes are sounding; it is easier to hold this chord down around the fifth or seventh fret than down at the first fret, where you are fighting against the nut, so start up there and then work your way down.

What works for E major also works for E minor, and using the F minor shape you can play every minor chord there is using this one shape. So why bother to learn any other chord shapes? The answer is that if you know only the barre chords with their roots on the sixth string, you will end up sliding up and down the guitar as if you were on rails. Guitarists tend to like the next chord to be quite near the one they're playing. It also makes for better voicings to be able to switch to a chord with its root on the A string, so here they are...



These A-shape chords are five-note shapes, so it's best to pull the barre back a little and use the tip of the finger to mute the sixth string. Once again, we have movable major and minor chords that can be played at every fret, and ideally you should know the names of the notes on the A string so that you can name these chords. If you are new to barre chords, it is a good idea to start with some songs which need only one. Ben E King's *Stand By Me* is in the key of C and needs only the F major barre chord. U2's *With Or Without You* is in the key of D and needs only B minor, which you play using the minor shape from figure 2 with the barre at the second fret.

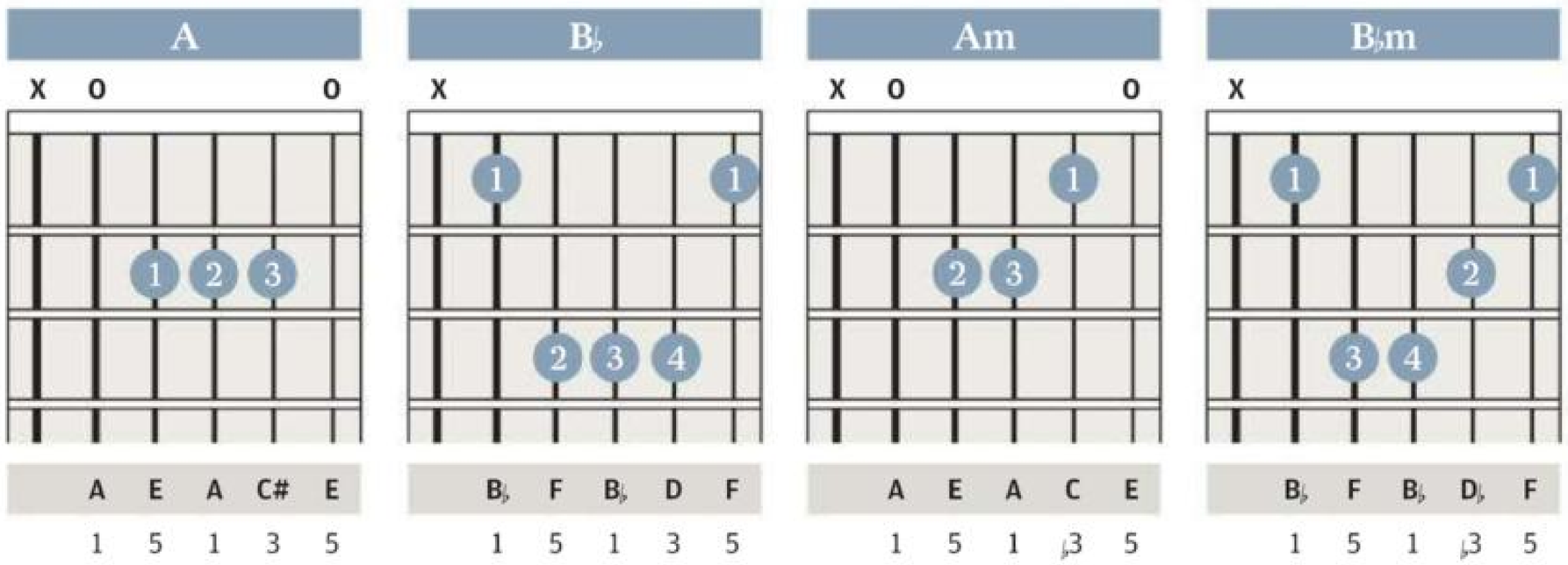
David Bowie's *Ziggy Stardust* also uses a B minor barre chord with some 5 chords on the "leper messiah..." section – see last month's instalment for 5 chords!

Once you get good at barre chords, you can try a chord sequence using nothing but; for example, B, F# and G#m using the shapes from figure 1 (barre 7th, 2nd and 4th frets), and then play E using the major shape from figure 2 with the barre at the seventh fret. Chord sequences such as this are great for percussive rhythm parts, as you can mute the strings by releasing the pressure on the barre while you strum. Check out songs such as Jason Mraz's *I'm Yours* for inspiration.

Chords derived from E major and E minor can be played as barre chords, and figure 3 has a selection placed up at the fifth fret, giving us an A root note and including a choice of A7 and Am7 voicings.

Notice that the root and fifth are doubled (played more than once) in most of these shapes and some of these voicings double the seventh; decide for yourself whether this adds something to the chord, or if you prefer those chords with the single seventh on the D string, where it has most effect. As I'm about to suggest, doubling several notes within a chord does not necessarily result in a bigger sound.

Fifth-string roots (Fig 2)



Seventh chords on sixth-string roots (Fig 3)

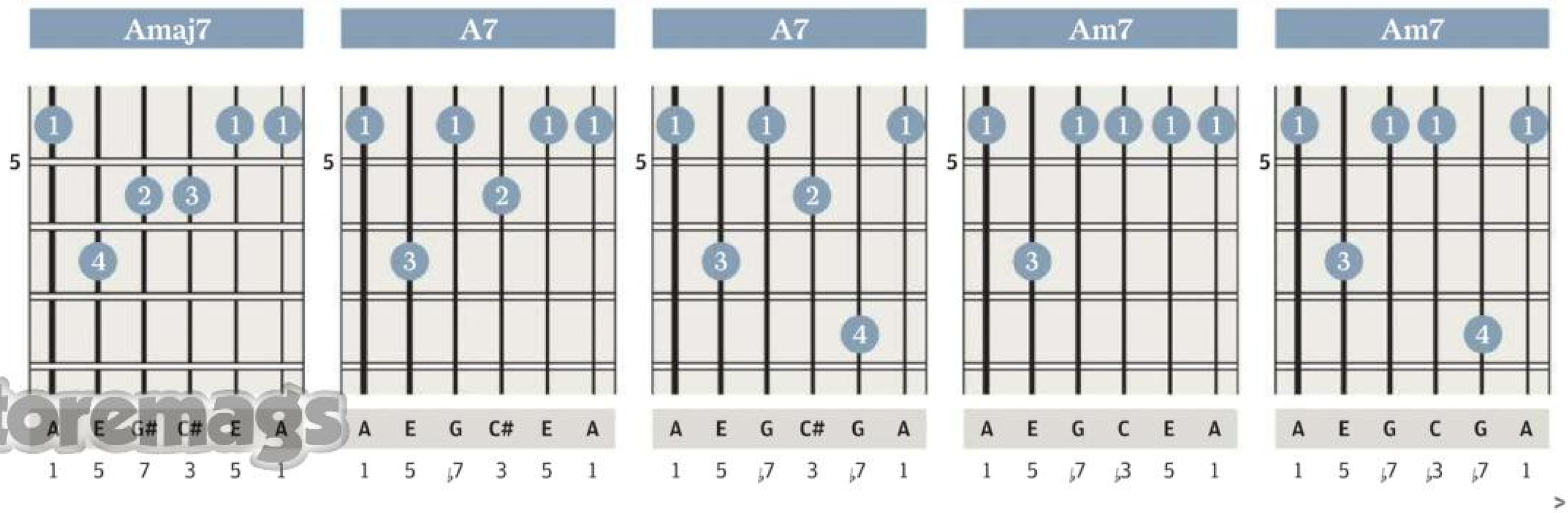


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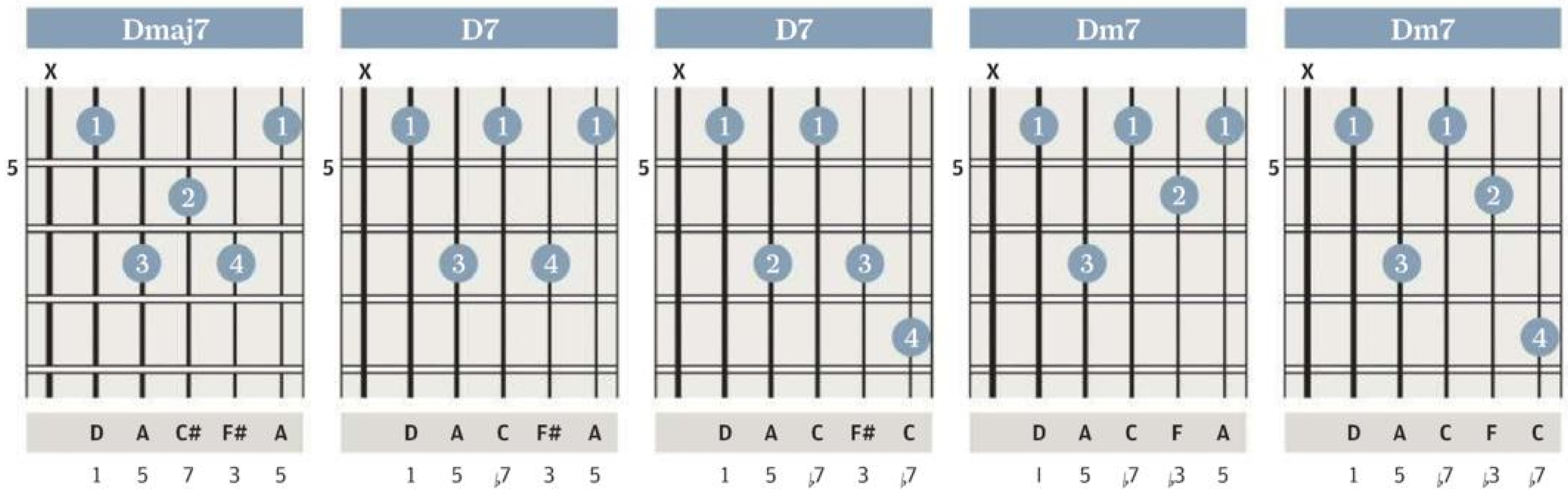
Figure 4 explores some possibilities using the major and minor chords from figure 2 (with root notes on the fifth string), but with added sevenths. We have shifted up to the fifth fret as before, producing a series of chords with D as the root note. As in figure 3, there is the option to double the seventh – should you wish to.

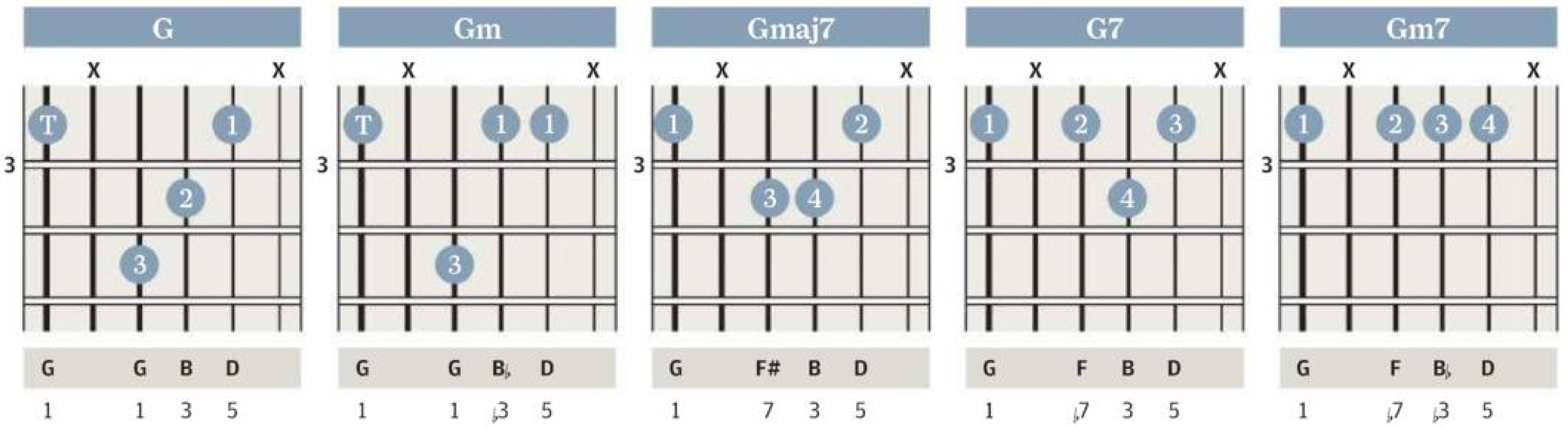
After all that struggle to hold down barre chords, it turns out that they might not be entirely necessary. Shifting to the third fret, figure 5 begins with four-note voicings for G major and G minor, both using the 'thumb over' technique. Notice that only the root note is doubled, and how focused and clear these chords are when compared to the mighty wall of sound that the chords in figure 1 produce. Moving on, we then have equally focused voicings for Gmaj7, G7 and Gm7. Not only do these four-string voicings occupy less space sonically (so sound engineers will love you), they are – once they become familiar – easier to play than barre chords. Move them around, experiment, create something...

We'll cover some more of these four-note voicings in next month's column. Meanwhile, if you're planning a massive windmill in the style of Pete Townshend, hold down a barre chord. Otherwise, a four-note voicing might actually sound better.

Seventh chords on fifth-string roots (Fig 4)



Four-note voicings (Fig 5)



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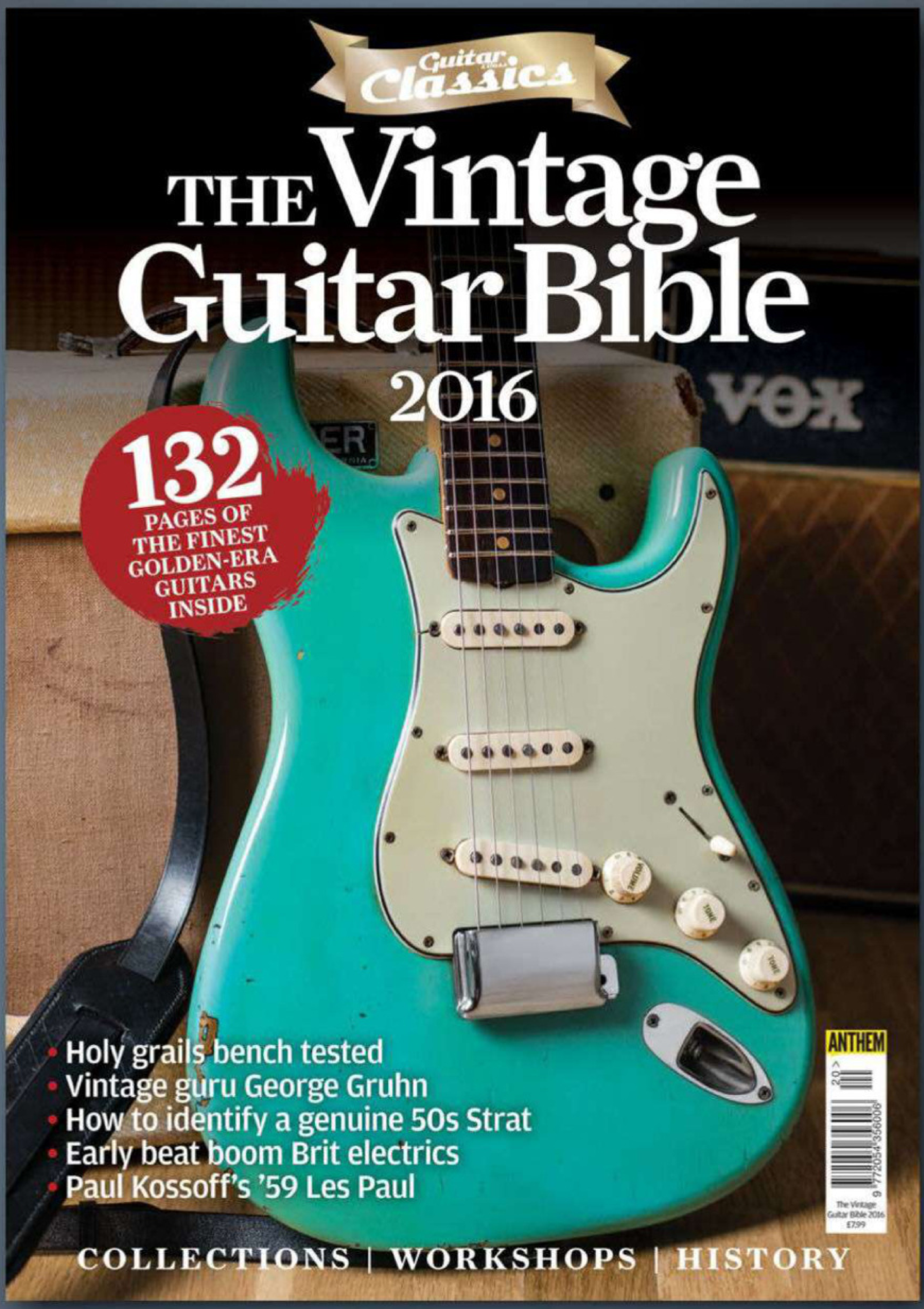

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Fretbuzz

Your letters. This month: inspired by Joe Bonamassa, a happy BluesBaby owner, and microphonic pickup problems solved

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Above average Joe

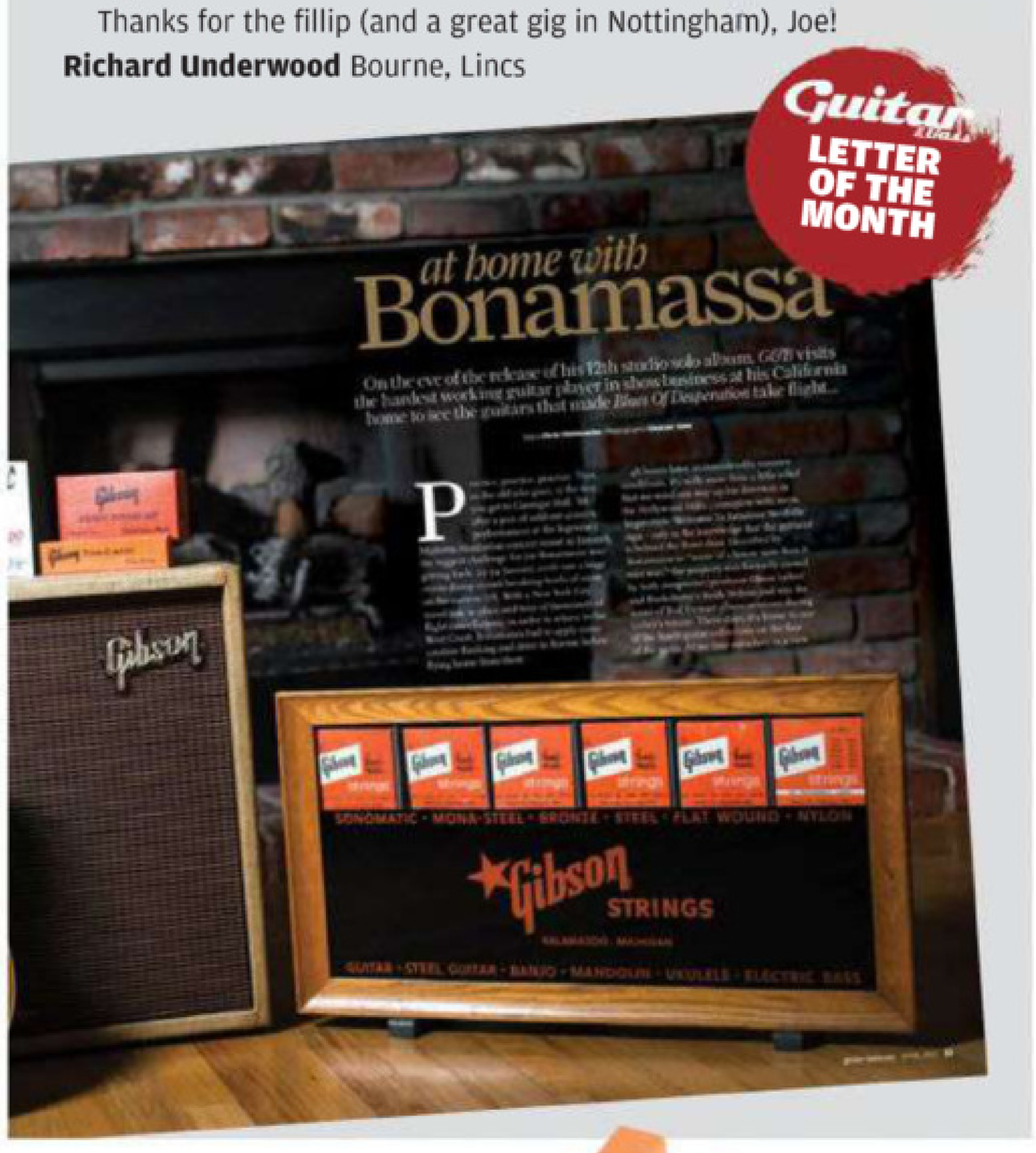
What a great Joe Bonamassa article [*G&B*, April 2016]. The photographic content alone would have fully justified its inclusion. The glorious full-page image of Snakebite alongside Principal Skinner was enough to prompt a purchase.

However, Joe's trenchant views about (i) playing your guitars to fully understand them; and (ii) aftermarket 'upgrades' to reissue and Custom Shop instruments made great sense. When a player of Joe's calibre says he tries to learn something new about a guitar every day, that should serve as a salutary warning to all guitar players, regardless of ability, experience and instrument(s) played.

I did a double-take when Joe made reference to a 12lb Les Paul Pro [Deluxe] plugged into a Lab Series L5. My '77 Pro weighs a mere(!) 11lbs, but it does run through a Lab Series combo! An L7 with 4x10s, as opposed to the twin 12s of the L5. But the similarities end there; I would never claim to be a 'kick ass' player. It is heart-warming to know that a revered player like Joe Bonamassa recognises that old-school, dare one say 'derided' in some quarters, hardware can deliver the goods.

Thanks for the fillip (and a great gig in Nottingham), Joe!

Richard Underwood Bourne, Lincs



Still got the Blues...

So, at last, somebody convinced you it would be a good idea to have a proper look at one of Stewart Ward's brainwaves [*G&B*, April 2016]...

I've had my own BluesBaby 22 up and running for over a year now. I bought the deluxe chassis (as per your review item), sourced my own reverb tank and speaker and built and covered my own plywood cabinet, all for under £400. As you'll see from the enclosed photo, the finished article is slightly green, so I called it the Green Machine.

It's not often I get the chance to read a review in *Guitar & Bass* and be able to compare what you say with my own experience of the same product, and I have to say I'm absolutely delighted to be able to agree with your top rating of this amp. Stewart's idea is that his company's products do what they say on the tin, and that's exactly the case here – as it is with his cables and, incidentally, the JD10 Preamp pedal, an example of which I've had since they came out (early 90s?).

By the way, the guitar leaning nonchalantly on the Green Machine is another home-built project. The 'Scrapocaster' was made from a lump of timber left by the builders after we'd had an extension built, all for a smidge under £500. Sounds great through the Session amp. Keep up the good work, *G&B*!

Ernie Vickery, via email

***G&B** Thanks Ernie, it's good to hear that there are players out there who are prepared to give*

WRITTEN A LETTER OF THE MONTH?

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ORANGE AMPLIFICATION

alternatives to valve technology a fair crack of the whip. We love the idea of using reclaimed timber for a guitar build, too!

Pot the difference

I've read a lot recently about microphonic pickups sounding 'better', but the problem I have is that I play in a band and use a couple of overdrive pedals stacked for large sections of the set, playing through a loud tweed amp. Is it possible to get authentic PAF tone without wax potting?

Darren Harris, via email

***G&B** Hi Darren. We contacted Matt Gleeson, of Monty's Guitars in London, to reply to your letter. This is what he had to say: "It is definitely possible to use an unpotted PAF-style pickup with gain and high volume without problems. Unpotted pickups can be more dynamic and harmonically rich than potted pickups, as the coil is allowed to react physically to the vibrations of the guitar. Problems arise when it is too microphonic, reacts too much, begins to self-oscillate and feeds back. Let's face it, that's not exactly musical...*

"This is usually caused by a couple of things. Either, one of the metal parts is not fitted securely and is being allowed to vibrate – with the cover the usual suspect, or the coil itself is not wound with enough tension to keep it under control – too much deadens it, too little makes it microphonic, squealing at any given opportunity. Unfortunately, if the coil's at fault there is not much you can do apart from potting it. More often than not, the cover is to blame – which is easily sorted.

"When the cover is not tightly pushed down onto the bobbins, it becomes a bell and gives you a high-pitched ring. It's an easy test – just tap the top with something metallic (be careful not to scratch it) and if it rings, it needs sorting.

"If that hasn't helped, the next thing to try is damping the cover. There are a few ways of doing this, but my favourite is placing a small strip of paper tape along the centre of the pickup, across both bobbins going lengthways, and then put four small dots of PVA glue along it. When the glue cures it goes rubbery, which is perfect for using as a damper. You can then refit the cover, making sure it's tight, and away you go.

"Reassuringly, there are plenty of famous PAF users who played at very high volumes, so don't let the lack of wax scare you."

Matt Gleeson, of Monty's Guitars

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Guitar & Bass

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

25 Tele upgrade tips

Magic mods and essential upgrades for the solidbody electric that started it all...

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INTERVIEWS

• Pendulum • Kenny Wayne Shepherd •
• Rick Nielsen • Eric Church •

REVIEWED

• Fender • Taylor • G&L • Blackstar •
• Faith • Danelectro • Hofner • Ashdown •

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ON SALE
06 MAY

•Contents are subject to change

New music

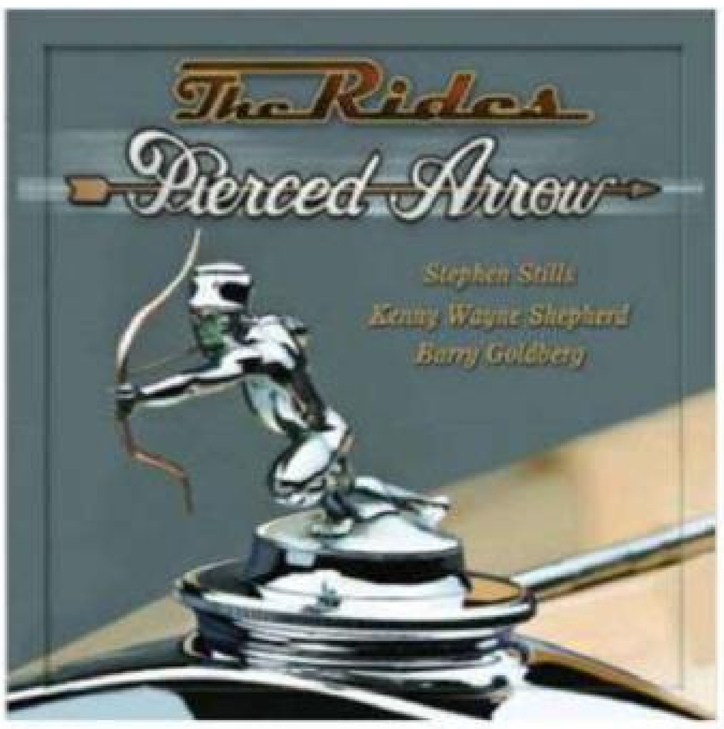
We round up and rate a selection of this month's guitar-driven album releases and reissues

Explosions In The Sky
THE WILDERNESS

Explosions In The sky wrote the blueprint for instrumental post-rock with 2003's *The Earth Is Not A Cold Dead Place*, an example of the genre that has arguably never been bettered. Their sixth studio album features some more aggressive moments, such as *Tangle Formations* – built on a driving snare-heavy drum pattern. The six-minute *Logic Of A Dream* shifts from ambient beginnings, via a psychedelic build and towering, proggy mid-section into a soothing outro decorated with volume swells and acoustic arpeggios. *Disintegration Anxiety* ups the tempo with an insistent palm-muted riff and distorted drums. The far shorter *Infinite Orbit* is a lesson in the beauty of simplicity, with a chiming arpeggio that rises to euphoria. They leave us with the shimmering beauty of *Landing Cliffs* – and, 13 years after their defining statement, Explosions in The Sky are still the masters of dynamics. **GW**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Mogwai, Sigur Ros*



The Rides
PIERCED ARROW

This follow-up to 2013's *Can't Get Enough* sees the blues-rock super trio (consisting of pyschedelic rock legend Stephen Stills, blues-rock guitar slinger Kenny Wayne Shepherd and former Electric Flag keys man Barry Goldberg) continue along broadly the same lines. Dismissed by some as a nostalgic nod to Stills' past *Super Session* project with Al Kooper and Michael Bloomfield, the new album defies this with an obvious love of the genre shared by all three musicians. The vocal and guitar duties are divided up between Stills and Shepherd, and they both harmonise and contrast well; on the album's plentiful solos, Kenny Wayne scuzzes up his Strat playing to suit Stills' gnarled vocals, and Stills provides the guitar restraint that Shepherd (understandably, given his talent) often struggles to apply. The result is raw, energetic and unpretentious blues rock with 60s authenticity. **CM**

6/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, SRV*

Laura Gibson
EMPIRE BUILDER

Empire Builder is a triumph against considerable odds. In March 2015, Gibson's New York apartment was destroyed in a gas explosion that killed two people and injured many. Everything she owned, including her guitars and the music she'd been working on, was obliterated. Gibson has returned with a wonderful record, spotlighting a fine, unsusual voice that's delicate and sweet yet cracked and weathered with roots in country and folk. *The Cause* demonstrates Gibson's verve for production, with cleverly arranged violins and lap steel combining deliciously, and on *Not Harmless* the Portland-born multi-instumentalist shows she's no slouch on the guitar with some tremendous angular playing. The title track and *Five And Thirty* are a pair of songs of striking, ghostly wonder adorned with astonishingly beautiful EBow and strings. A record of striking refinement. **GW**

9/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Marika Hackman, Joanna Newsom*

Yeasayer
AMEN & GOODBYE

Peddling quirky pop with psychedelic notes, elements of experimental rock, 80s synth pop and 'world' music, Brooklyn's Yeasayer are as far from a traditional rock band as you can get. Here, they shuffle their pack again, stepping away from the digital realm. *I Am Chemistry*'s mutating soundscape is the perfect entry point to a record that's overflowing with invention and creativity. **CM**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Sufjan Stevens, Animal Collective*

Janet Feder
THIS CLOSE

The Denver musician's latest comprises nine hauntingly beautiful tracks – some instrumental and others featuring her fragile vocals. Feder plays 'prepared guitar', placing various objects on the guitar strings to expand the sonic palette – a technique used to great effect. The playing is impeccable, drawing from classical, folk and avant-garde influences on what is Feder's best work yet. **DJ**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Scott Fields, Hans Tammen*

Frightened Rabbit
PAINTING OF A PANIC ATTACK

Painting of a Panic Attack is not without interesting moments but is indebted to others. The National, whose guitarist Aaron Dessner produced the album, are a clear influence; the record is swathed in reverb, gentle organ, doomy piano, crisp acoustic guitar and brass. Texture is clearly Frightened Rabbit's strong suit, but these songs lack the memorable riffs, melodies and dynamics found on their previous work. **TS**

6/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *The National, Chvrches*

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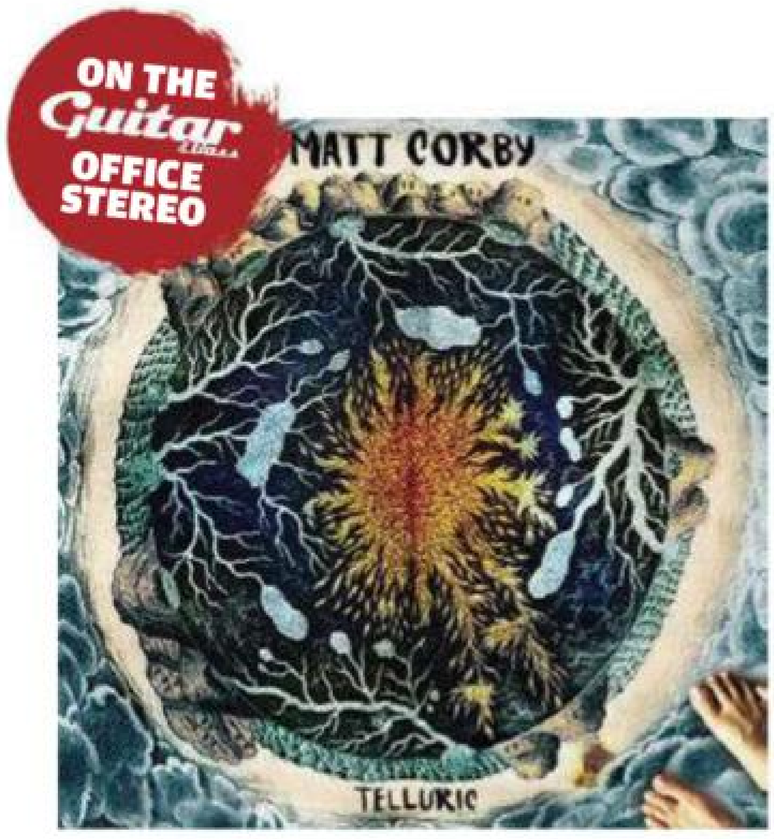

Matt Corby
TELLURIC

Telluric is a deep and expressive album, filled with glistening vocals, considered lyrics and some fine playing. Corby has clearly matured gracefuly as a songwriter in recent years, and a tasteful mixture of blues, soul and R&B provides the sonic backbone of the album, most notably on *Smooth Lady Wine* and *Belly Side Up*. *Monday* exposes Corby's raw talent, with haunting Jeff Buckley-esque vocals. It's a truly beautiful listen. **TT**

9/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Jeff Buckley, Otis Redding*

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FEATURED ALBUM

PJ Harvey
THE HOPE SIX DEMOLITION PROJECT

PJ Harvey's first album since 2011's *Let England Shake* was created in sessions open to the public, and inspired by visits to Kosovo, Afghanistan and impoverished parts of Washington DC. The scenes of human suffering witnessed in those places is overtly present on *The Ministry Of Defence* – Harvey painting a dystopian picture with haunting choral backing vocals and jarring woodwind – and *A Line In The Sand*. *The Wheel* is one of the outstanding moments – a raunchy, Stonesy stomp that sees horns, handclaps and Harvey's clean, driving Fender Jag riff juxtaposed with frank, affecting lyrics about child deaths in some of the war-torn locales she visited. *The Hope Six Demolition Project* is a challenging listen, on which Polly Jean doesn't mince her words. Long may that continue, because she remains one of the nation's brightest and most fearlessly provocative songwriters. **GW**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Nick Cave, Patti Smith*

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JAREN JOHNSTON

"My Spinal Tap moment..."

The frontman of Nashville's country-fried Southern rockers The Cadillac Three tells all...

1 I couldn't live without my...
"For the band, it'd be lap steel. Kelby [Ray] is covering the bass and the steel part. You kind of lose half the band when he goes away. He has two channels and does them both with two volume pedals."

2 In another life I would be...
"Neil [Mason, drums] would own a Mexican restaurant selling tacos and I'd be real fat, eatin' there all the time."

3 The moment that started it all...
"My first two tapes were Metallica's *...And Justice For All* and Lynyrd Skynyrd's Greatest Hits. That explains a lot about why we sound like we do."

4 The one that got away...
"My buddy always told me, never sell a guitar. So I've a shit ton of gear just sitting there. I've kind of kept all my stuff."

5 My Spinal Tap moment...
"It happens every other day. We get lost going into every venue. You have those moments when you think you are going to be really huge in a city and you're not, and those moments where you think you're going to be nobody in a city and you're huge. Back in the States, we watch that movie on the bus quite a bit."

6 The best advice I've ever been given...
"My dad is a musician. He told me to write songs. Be creative and write songs. That's how you really get in there and affect people and have a long career. I've always followed that. It's fun, I love it and every now and again you get lucky and somebody likes your shit!"

7 The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...
"It depends what tuning I'm in, but most of the time it's some Petty riff. We have a song called *The South,* and sometimes I play the little bridge part. I like how that sounds, and you can always tell the guitar is in tune that way. If it's regular tuning it's always Nirvana."

8 The most important thing on my rider...
"Jack Daniel's and tequila."

9 My guiltiest musical pleasure...
"I listen to a lot of pop music on planes and stuff. I just like good songs and different crafts, I like to listen to the way other people put together songs. I listen to a lot of metal, though, too."

10 If I could learn to play one thing...
"No, I'm pretty bad-ass, I've got it all down. You didn't like it? You don't like my left hand? I thought I was throwing fire at you, man! [laughs]"

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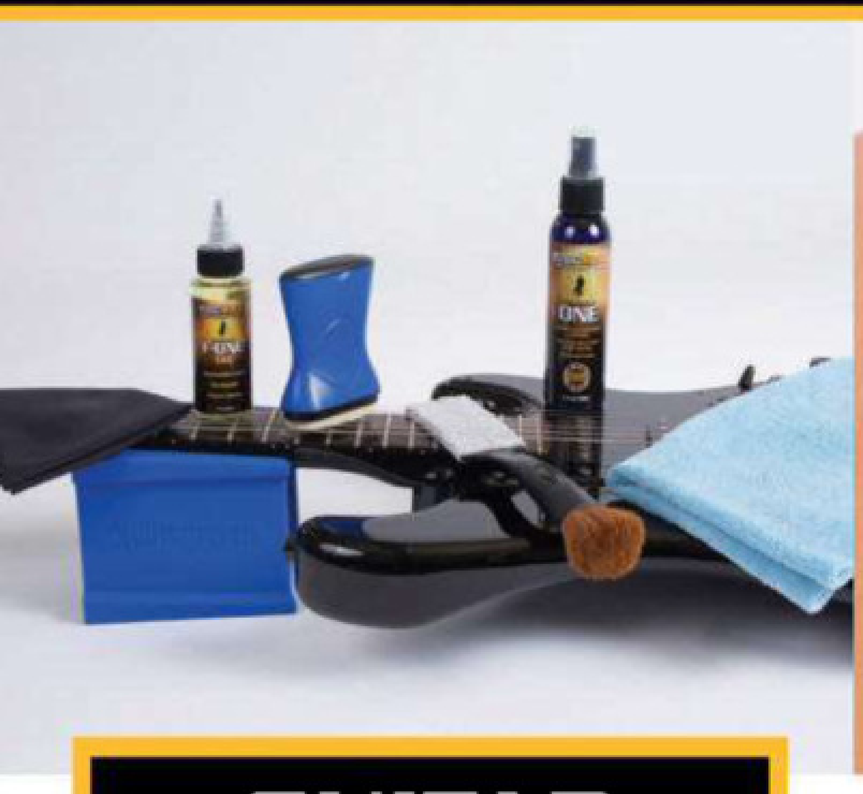

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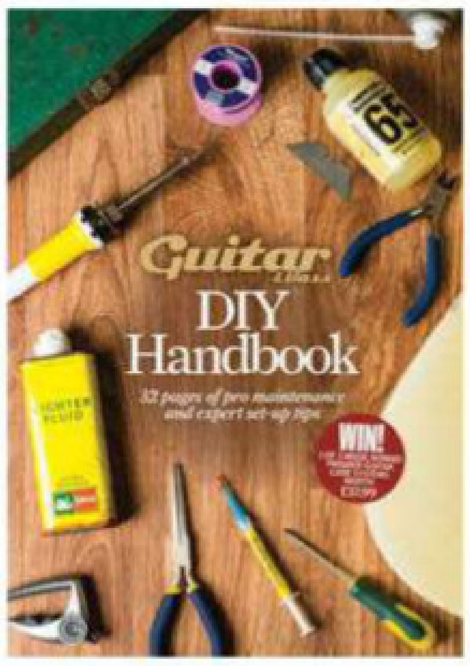
Win a Music Nomad Premier Guitar Care System cleaning kit worth £37.99

Can you fix it? Yes you can...

Every month, *G&B*'s senior product specialist Huw Price grasps a soldering iron or screwdriver and plunges into the rabbit hole for the sake of the betterment of guitar kind. As maintenance is the subject of this free 32-page supplement, it seems only right and proper that Huw is your guide through the following pages, in which he will explain how to tackle a wide variety of common ailments that plague our beloved instruments.

Whether it's a scratchy pot, a sticky nut or a misaligned bolt-on neck, you'll find the answers here – it's a free gift that'll keep on giving for years to come. After working your way through all this, you'll never have any excuse to let your guitar fall into disrepair again; then, on page 30, there's even a chance to win one of three Premier Guitar Care Systems worth £37.99 each, courtesy of Music Nomad. Good luck, and don't forget to write in for advice if you feel as though a particular repair job is beyond you – we're always here to help!



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1

1. TRUSS ROD ADJUSTMENT

There are times when a guitar that has been playing well for as long as you can remember suddenly feels 'a bit off'. Maybe the action feels a tad higher than it was, or maybe it feels lower and you can't get notes to ring cleanly. Or perhaps you've noticed that the intonation isn't quite as sweet as once it was.

Guitars are made from wood, and wood has a tendency to move around, depending on how hot, cold or humid conditions might be. This is most apparent when necks move, and since the middle of the last century, most guitar manufacturers have built truss rods into their necks to allow for subtle adjustments. Truss rod tweaking may also be necessary if you decide to change string gauge.

Most necks have a small degree of up bow, and you can gauge this 'relief' quite easily. Ensure the strings are all tuned to concert pitch and fret one string at the first and 14th frets simultaneously. You should be able to see a small gap between the top of the fifth or sixth fret and the bottom of the string.

If the gap is larger than a millimetre or so, the neck may have too much relief and the action may feel as though it's too high. Conversely, a very small gap – or no gap at all – could mean there's not enough relief, and you may get buzzes, rattles or dead spots.

On vintage Fender-style guitars and many acoustics, truss rod access is usually at the body end of the neck. With acoustics, you can usually reach in through the soundhole, but with electrics you generally have to slacken the strings and pop off the neck.

Later Fender-style guitars, and pretty much all models based on a Gibson or Gretsch design, have the truss rod access behind the nut at the headstock end. This allows you to tweak a truss rod while the neck is under tension. You can assess the results by playing the guitar.

Depending on the type of guitar, adjusting the truss rod may require the use of a large crosshead screwdriver, a socket wrench or an allen key. Occasionally, manufacturers supply the necessary tool inside the case.

If your neck has a severe up bow or back bow, truss rod adjustment is not the answer, and you should entrust the work to a qualified guitar tech. However, minor corrections are well within the scope of the amateur, so long as you remember to move the truss rod only a quarter of a turn at a time.

To increase the relief, turn the truss rod anti-clockwise; and to decrease relief, turn it clockwise. Putting capos over the first and 15th frets (12th on acoustics) will allow you to gauge your progress.

If you can get to grips with truss rod adjustment, you'll be able to keep your guitar playing at its best, and you may save yourself the cost of unnecessary set-ups.

WHY YOU NEED THIS
Action unaccountably becomes too low or too high; intonation seems off; you're changing string gauge

WHAT YOU NEED
Large crosshead screwdriver; allen key or socket wrench; two capos (optional)

1 You can use capos to provide a helping hand. With the strings tuned to concert pitch, place capos on frets one and 15, then check the gap between the top of fret seven and the bottom of the strings

2 Truss rod access can be found at the headstock and heel ends of necks. The USA Fender on the left is adjusted using an allen key and the reissue on the right requires a screwdriver

3 This is the gap between the seventh fret and the string. The gap is big, therefore this neck has a lot of relief

2. REPLACING A PICKUP

If your pickup is broken, changing it qualifies as maintenance. But most of us change pickups in search of improved tone or completely different sounds. Here, we'll deal with like-for-like replacements, using pickups that have the same dimensions and fixing mechanisms.

To get started, you'll have to remove the strings and gain access to the wiring. Depending on the type of guitar, pickup wires will be soldered to the volume control or the selector switch. You'll have to trace the wires to figure out what goes where.

Draw a diagram or take a photo with your phone to ensure that everything is put back in the right place. This is particularly important with coil-tapped pickups that may have multi-strand cables connected to toggle or push/pull switches. It's usually best to de-solder the pickups before separating them from the guitar itself.

Humbucking pickups tend to be suspended from plastic surround rings; you need to remove the four screws holding the ring to the body before removing the pickup height adjustment screws. Strat pickups are suspended from the pickguard and Tele neck pickups are often screwed into the body. Tele bridge pickups are the most fiddly because they dangle from the bridge plate, so the bridge has to be taken off before the pickup can be removed.

Keep any screws, springs and tubular spacers safe, because you may need to re-use them. You can now mount the new pickups onto the guitar, scratchplate or bridge then re-solder the connections.

It's advisable to test if the wiring is correct before you re-string the guitar. Just plug in the guitar with the amp volume set low and tap the polepieces with a screwdriver. Once you've established that the controls and the switch are working properly, you can go ahead and re-string and reassemble the guitar. That's not quite the end of the process, however, because setting the pickup height – or more accurately the proximity of the pickup to the strings – is absolutely critical to getting the best from any set of pickups.

Up close to the strings, a pickup will sound bright, loud and aggressive. Setting it further away may achieve a sweeter, clearer and more dynamic tone, but setting a pickup too low can result in a lifeless and dull response. Remember, you can also adjust the bass and treble balance by tilting a pickup at either end.

Try starting with the bridge pickup and, once you're happy, move to the neck. Attempt to match the volume levels between the two pickups before fine-tuning the neck's bass and treble response. If you have a middle pickup, too, try to achieve even levels across all three pickups.

WHY YOU NEED THIS
Broken pickup; tone upgrade

WHAT YOU NEED
Screwdrivers; soldering iron; solder

1 The pickup's shield wire is soldered to the volume pot casing and the core wire is soldered to the outer lug

2 To remove the P-90 from this Les Paul Junior, the strings had to be moved to one side. Rather than remove the strings, we slackened them off, placed a capo at the first fret and popped off the bridge

3 Here's the new pickup soldered onto the volume pot. We moved the tone capacitor to the volume control's centre lug while we were at it to make the wiring vintage-correct

4 Here's the Monty's P-90 mounted on the guitar with the bridge and strings reinstated

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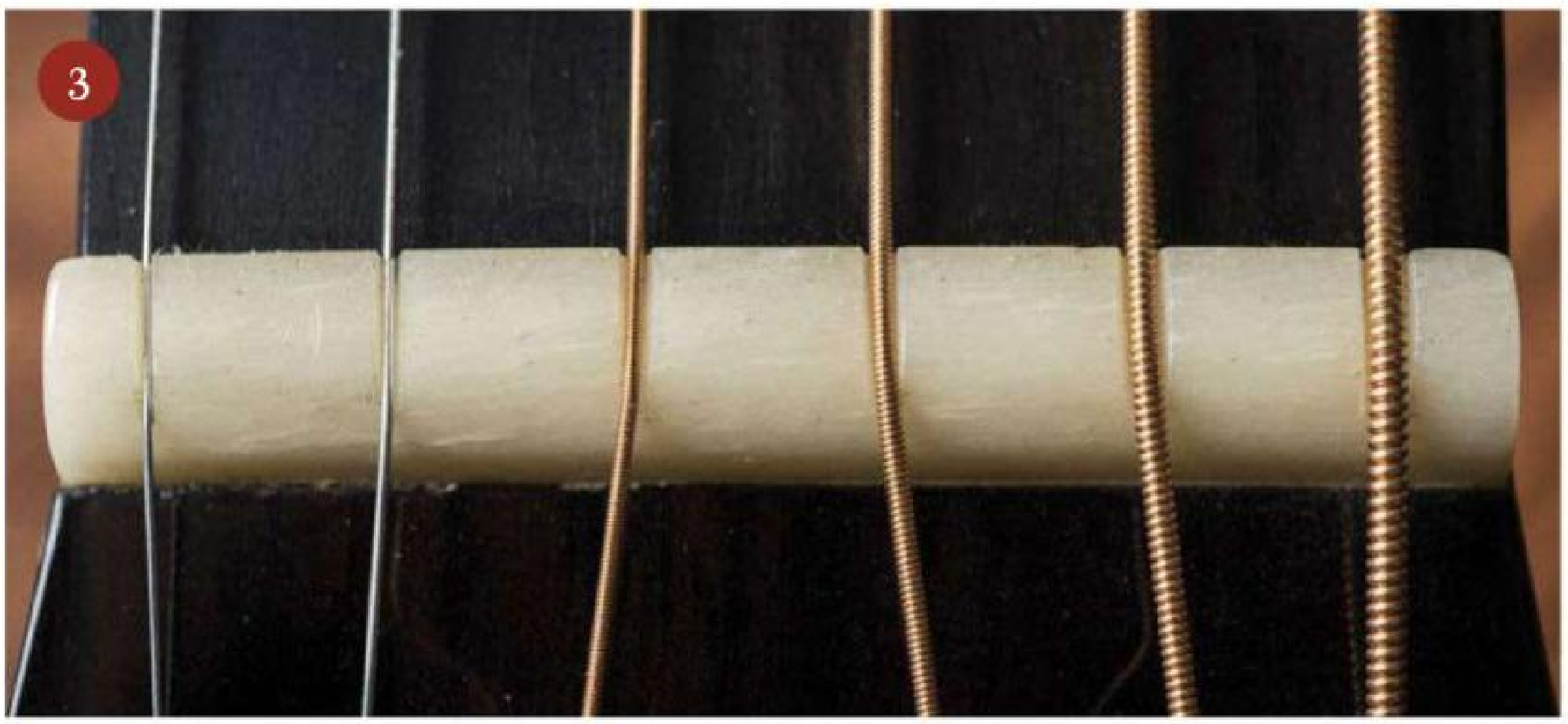

3. NUT REPLACEMENT

We should first point out that we're not discussing how to cut, carve and slot a nut from a bone blank. That requires some serious luthier chops as well as specialist tools. Instead, we're talking about drop-in replacements from suppliers such as Allparts UK, that are pre-slotted and will require only minimal adjustments in order to fit correctly.

Many factories fit nuts prior to the finishing stage, so the sides of the nut will be covered in lacquer or paint. You'll have to score the finish around the edges of the nut very carefully to ensure you don't remove chunks of finish along with the nut.

Nuts are usually glued in place, so you must proceed with care. After removing the strings, place a wooden block against one of the long edges of the nut and tap the block lightly with a mallet. Move the block to the other edge and tap it again, using very little force.

The idea is to rock the nut back and forth in its slot sufficiently to break any glue joints. Eventually, it should begin to move and you may be able to get a narrow flathead screwdriver under one end to prise the nut out from its slot.

If you're working on a Fender-style neck, you will need to check whether you need to order a replacement nut with a flat or curved bottom. Pre-cut nuts are supplied very slightly over-sized, so you will have to adjust the thickness before they'll drop into the slot. The ends will also have to be trimmed to prevent them from overhanging the edges of the neck.

Try fixing some 800 or 1000 grit abrasive paper onto a kitchen work surface with masking tape around its edges. You can use this to adjust the nut until it fits snugly into its slot. Assuming that it's pre-slotted, you can adjust the height of the slots by sanding the bottom of the nut.

Be sure to work very slowly and try not to remove too much material at one time. If you have to remove material from the bottom of a curved nut, simply tape some abrasive paper over the fingerboard and move the nut base back and forth lengthways across the abrasive to maintain the desired radius.

Be very careful, because if you drop the nut too far down into the slot, the open strings will buzz against the first fret. Slightly too high is better than slightly too low here. Once you're happy, place two small dabs of superglue on the underside of the nut and seat it in the slot. The key is to work slowly and accept that replacing a nut can be a long procedure.

WHY YOU NEED THIS
Broken nut; poor-sounding plastic nut; string slots too low

WHAT YOU NEED
Craft knife with fresh blade; mallet; small block of wood; abrasive paper; masking tape

1 This nut is chipped at the back of the top E slot. It works OK, but if the chip was at the front, the nut would need replacing

2 You can buy bone and Graphtec nut blanks from Allparts UK. The craft knife is for scoring the finish prior to nut removal. Unless you're planning to cut loads of nuts, a set of nut files might be prohibitively expensive

3 Notice how the upper part of the wound strings sits above the nut slots

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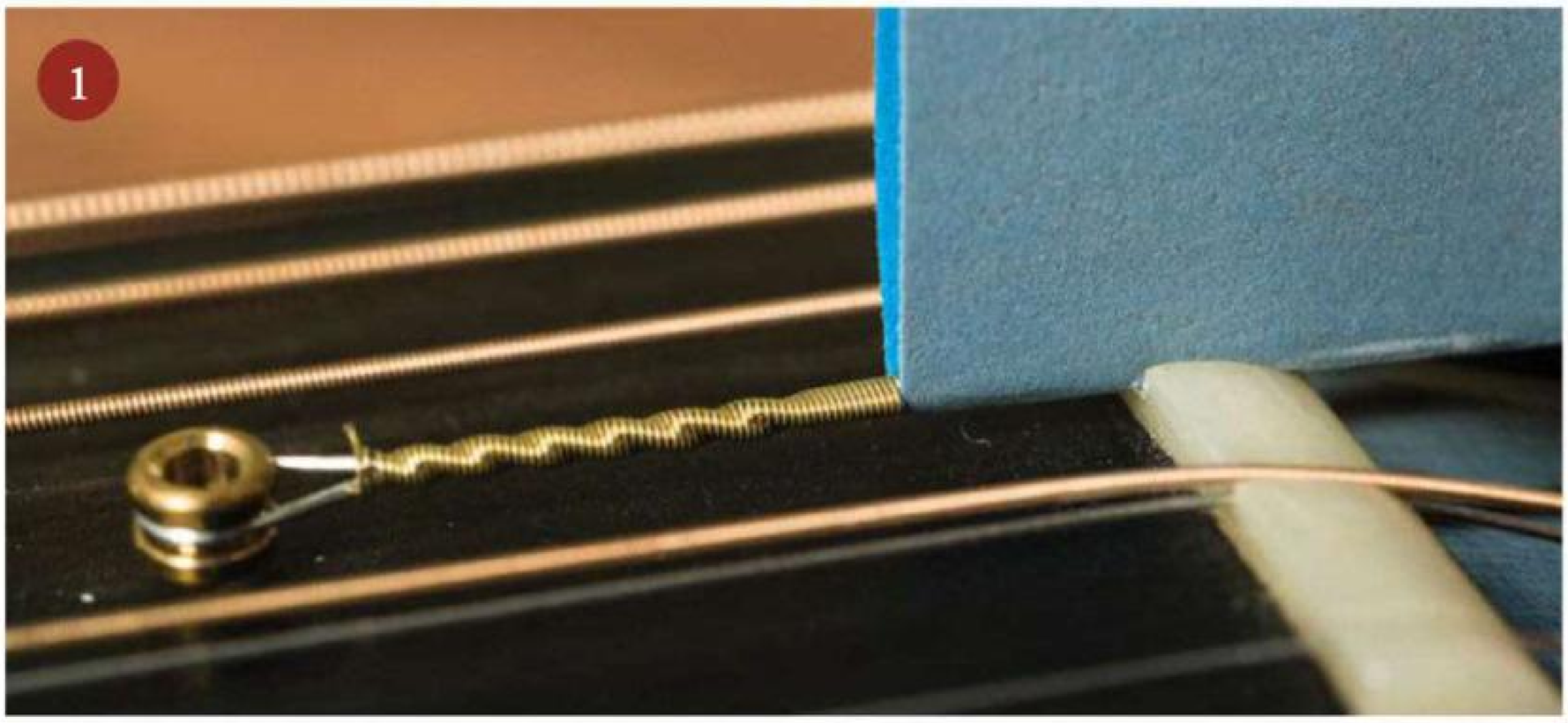

4. ELIMINATING NUT PINGS

There's no denying that tuners wear out, but countless vintage guitars have been fitted with Schallers and Grovers that they never really needed. Machineheads are often blamed for unstable tuning when the real cause is friction in the nut slots.

Have you ever played a guitar that makes pinging and clicking noises when you tune up? Or maybe you can feel the string slipping between grooves in the nut slot when you bend it. Listen closely when it happens and most likely the noises will be emanating from the nut.

Luthiers use special nut files to smooth and finesse nut slots, and most hobbyists will consider a set of nut files too expensive. Instead, take a small piece of 800 or 1,000 grit wet & dry abrasive paper, wrap it around the string and push it into the offending slot.

The idea is to smooth the surfaces of the slot and not to deepen it. Work the paper back and forth a few times then pop the string back in to test your progress. Don't rush this, just be patient and keep checking.

If you manage to improve the slot, try following up with some still finer micromesh. You can even mask off the neck on both sides of the nut and finish off the slot using chrome polish. To further reduce friction, try introducing some lubricant into the slot. Some people use graphite from a soft pencil, while others prefer to use Vaseline. You can also buy specialist guitar lubricants such as Big Bends Nut Sauce or Guitar Grease.

WHY YOU NEED THIS
Audible clicks and pings when you tune up or bend strings; unstable tuning

WHAT YOU NEED
Wet & dry paper; polishing compound; lubricant

1 If you haven't got fret files, wrap some 1,000 grit or finer wet and dry abrasive paper around the string and use it to smooth the slot

2 Having masked off the fingerboard and headstock, the nut slots are then polished with Autosol chrome cleaner

3 After smoothing and polishing, you can add some lubricant to the slot. Big Bends Nut Sauce is a popular brand and it soaks into bone to keep it slippery

5. OUTPUT SOCKET REPLACEMENT

WHY YOU NEED THIS
Intermittent or failed contact causing guitar signal to cut out

WHAT YOU NEED
Pliers; soldering iron; solder; needle pliers

Guitar parts eventually wear out, especially mechanical parts that take a lot of use and abuse. Output sockets are a case in point and most of us will have experienced issues with our signal cutting out. Try wiggling two or more cables in the output socket. If the signal cuts in and out with each cable, you can be pretty sure the output socket is at fault.

Assuming you're not dealing with an original part on a vintage instrument, the sure fire fix is to install a new output socket. In most cases, there will be just two connections. However, you may find a third wire if the bridge or trem spring claw is grounded at the jack socket, or if it's a switching jack for active pickup systems.

Replacing an output socket is pretty straightforward with Strats or Les Paul-type guitars because it's easy to gain access to the socket. Semi-acoustics present problems because you will probably have to pull the socket, and all the controls, out through an f-hole. As for vintage-style Tele jack cups, you'd probably be best advised to leave those to a professional.

Assuming that you can get at the socket, make a note of which connection is positive and which is negative. The negative (or ground) will usually be black. Heat a joint with a soldering iron and pull the wire away as soon as the solder melts. Then do the same with the other wire.

Unscrew the nut holding the socket in position and remove it, then fix the new socket to the plate or cup and solder the wires onto the new socket. Ensure the wires do not move as the molten solder is setting and never try to speed up the cooling process by blowing on a solder joint.

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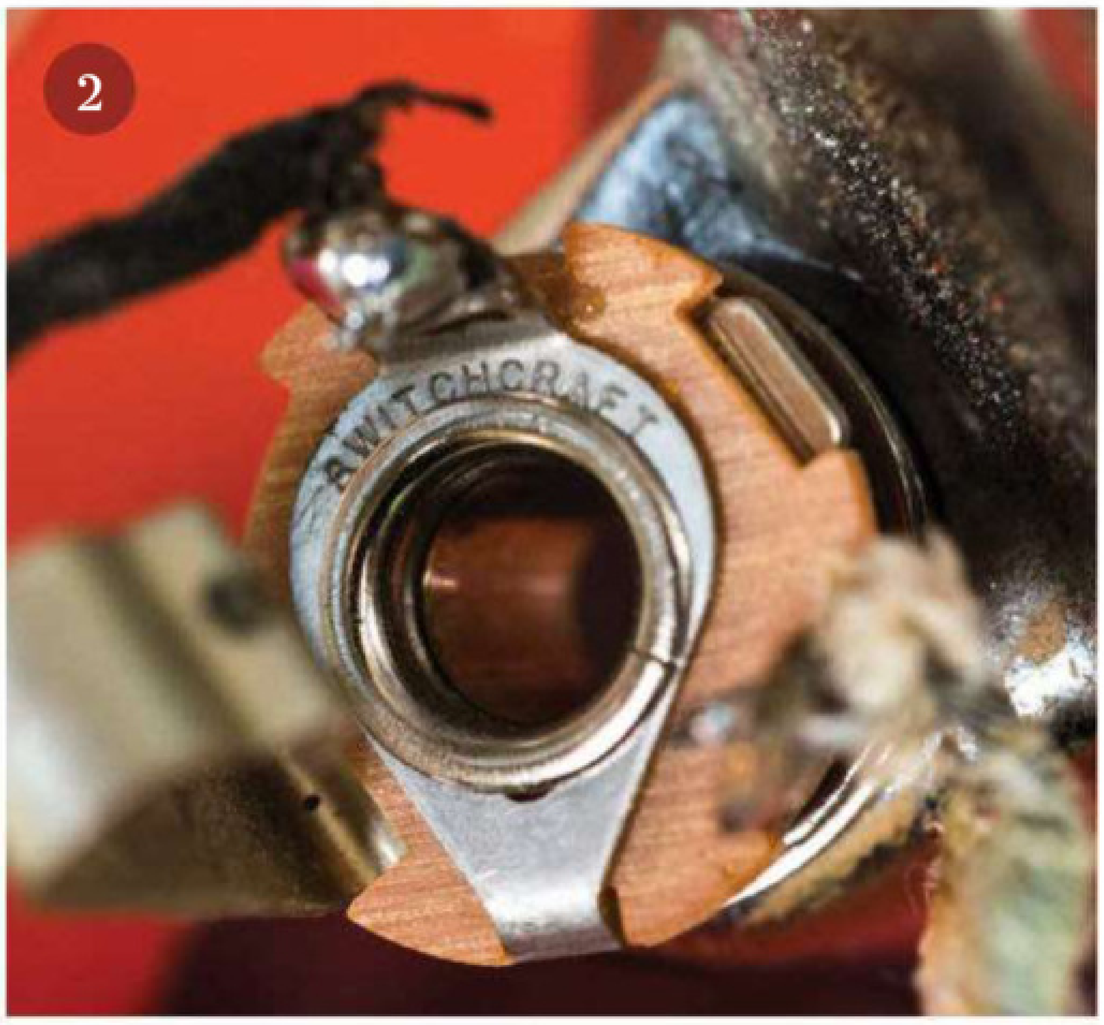

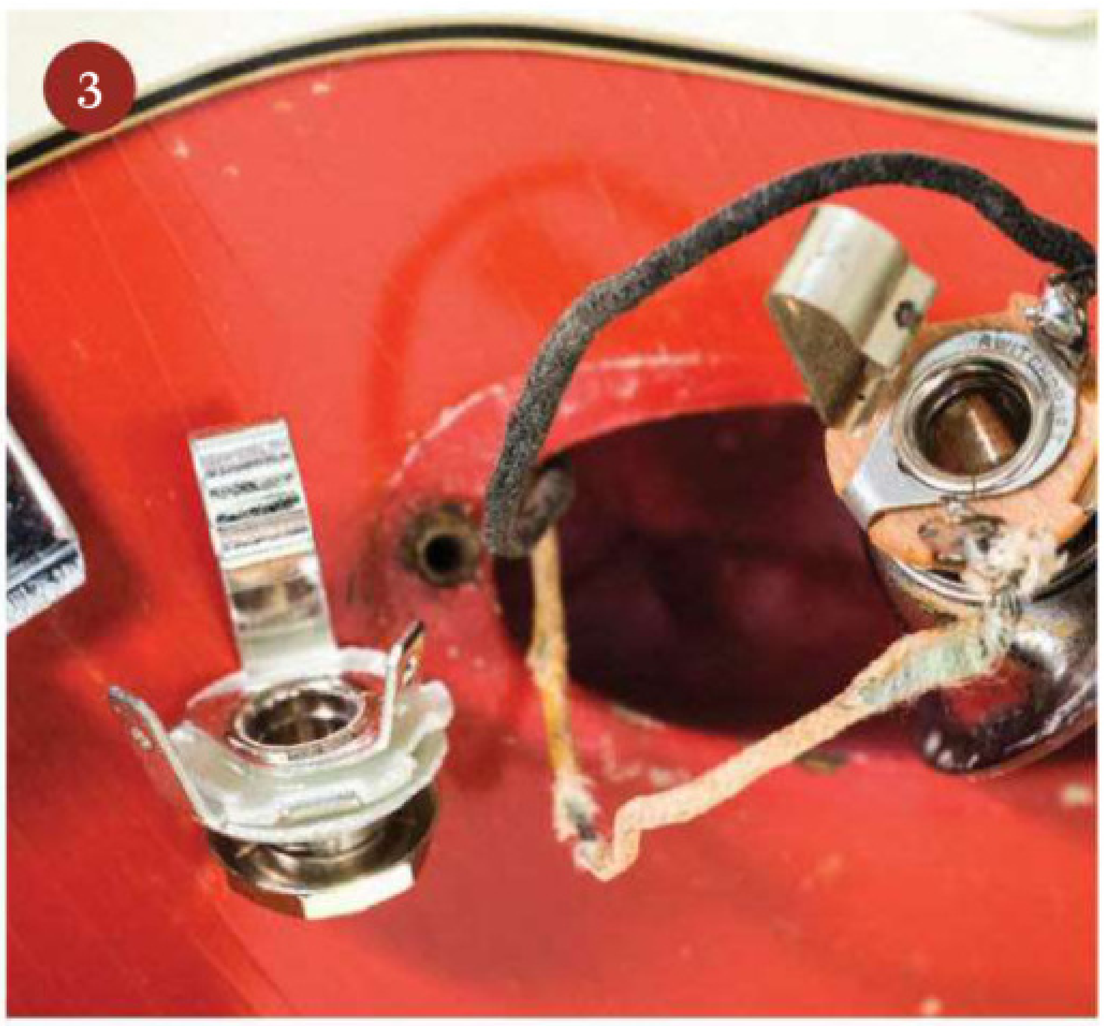

1 This traditional jack socket has two solder tags. The black wire is soldered to the sleeve and you can see that it's connected to the centre of the socket. The white wire is soldered to the tip tag, and that corresponds to the protruding section

2 Switchcraft is a popular and reliable brand for jack sockets. You can get these from Allparts UK

3 A new jack socket waiting to be installed

4 The wires are de-soldered from the jack's solder lugs. This process will be reversed then the new socket is fitted

5 With the changeover complete, the jack cup is screwed back onto the Stratocaster body

6. REPLACING A POTENTIOMETER

WHY YOU NEED THIS
Pots get noisy and seize up; you wish to try a different value

WHAT YOU NEED
Pliers; soldering iron; solder; needle pliers

1 You can reach the electronics on a Tele without removing the strings. They're mounted under a control plate held on by a screw at each end

2 The extension tube helps direct the contact cleaner to exactly where you need it

3 Before you disconnect the potentiometer, draw a wiring diagram or take a photo. This will give you something to refer to when reconnecting the wires

4 A new pot ready to be installed. Recessed grub screws secure Tele knobs to pot shafts, so we need solid shaft pots

5 Single gang potentiometers have three solder tags. It's also common practice to solder screed and ground wires to the pot casing

Squirting cleaner into a potentiometer usually cures noise problems, but sometimes pots are beyond saving. As well as being noisy, they can develop dead spots or even seize up completely. Even if your controls are working properly, you may want to experiment with different potentiometer values or tapers to fine-tune your tone or achieve a specific response.

Control pots can usually be found under pickguards or control cover plates. Identify the potentiometer you wish to change and make a note of the existing connections. You can do this by drawing a diagram or taking a snapshot using a digital camera or your phone.

Remove the control knob and take a hot soldering iron to the first solder tag on the pot. As soon as the solder has melted, pull the wire away from the pot using a pair of needle pliers. You can use your fingers instead, but sooner or later you'll burn them. Repeat the process until the potentiometer is disconnected completely from the circuit. Using larger pliers, unscrew the nut holding the potentiometer onto the body or the pickguard and remove the pot.

Fix the new potentiometer in position and solder the wires onto the solder tags, ensuring that the original connections are maintained. You may opt to wrap the exposed ends of the wires around the tags to achieve a secure mechanical fixing before soldering the joint. Once you're done, reassemble, tune up and you should be good to go.

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7. STRINGING A BIGSBY

WHY YOU NEED THIS...
Changing strings on a Bigsby-equipped guitar can be tricky with only one pair of hands

WHAT YOU NEED
A pen or pencil; capo; octopus (optional); wire snips

Our esteemed editor Chris once described this process as a job for an octopus, but stringing up a Bigsby-equipped guitar needn't be as tricky as that description suggests. There seem to be two main issues that people find troublesome – getting strings to hook onto the roller bar pins and preventing them from falling off the pins when they're threaded through the tuner posts to be tuned up.

Start by wrapping the ball end of the string around a pen, pencil or even your finger, to create a loop. Once the string is bent, it should hold its shape and will be easier to hook onto the pin. If your Bigsby has a tension bar at the front, pass the string under the bar before hooking it on. Hold the ball end of the string onto the pin with one hand, then pull the string tight with your other hand. While maintaining the tension, let go of the string's ball end, using a capo to clamp the string in position. This is where a 'one-handed' capo such as a G7th proves invaluable.

Both hands will now be free to thread the string through the tuner and make the first few wraps around the post. Use the tuner to tension the string before releasing > the capo. Simply repeat the process for the other five strings.

1 With traditional Bigsby vibrato tailpieces, you must secure the ball ends of the strings onto pins that protrude from the roller bar

2 Wrap the string's ball end around a pen, pencil or even your finger to create a hook

3 If your Bigsby has a front tension bar, push the string under the bar before you hook it onto the pin

4 With the capo holding the string, you can thread the string through the tuner post

5 Pull the string tight with one hand and hold it there with a capo

6 Now you can make a couple of wraps around the tuner post before using the tuner to bring up the tension. Remove the capo and you're ready to fit the next string

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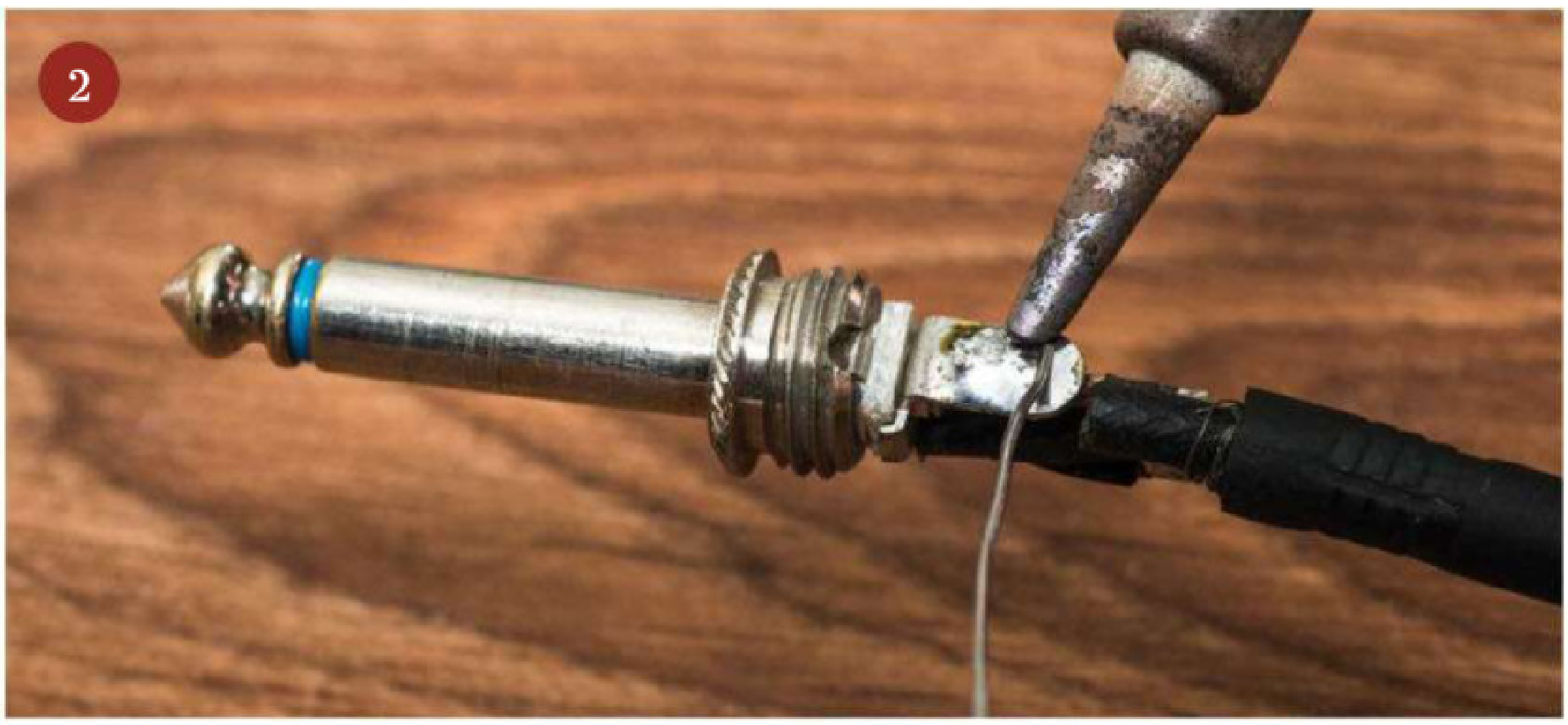


8. REPAIRING A JACK LEAD

Even the most reliable of guitar cables will one day let us down. But before you throw that cable away and buy a new one, it's worth trying to fix it. This is about as easy as electronic maintenance gets.

Firstly, check over the jack plugs for damage because they can fall apart. If everything looks OK, choose the continuity setting on your multimeter – it's the one that goes 'beep' when you touch the test wires together.

Guitar cables have an insulated centre core wire that connects to the tip of a jack plug. The centre core is wrapped in a layer of wires that's called the screen, or shield. That screen is connected to the sleeve of the jack plug. The multimeter is used to test which connection has failed, and to do this you touch the meter's test leads to the jack tips – one on each plug. Do the same for the two sleeves; the one that's broken won't beep – but it could be both that are at fault.

Unscrew the outer body of each jack plug and look at the solder joints. There will be two joints for each plug, and you will probably find one or more joints that have failed. If you're unsure, repeat the multimeter test, this time touching the test leads onto the solder joints rather than the jack plugs.

If you can't achieve continuity by touching the solder joints, it's most likely that there's a break somewhere along the length of the cable. In practical terms, that probably means it's new cable time. However, if you can find a dodgy joint, it's time to heat up the soldering iron and repair it.

If you have a vice to hold the plug, it's preferable to use it. Heat from the iron will transfer through the plug and it will become too hot to handle. If you don't have a vice, instead use some sticky tape to hold the end of the cable, and wedge the cable up to keep the jack above your work surface.

Flow fresh solder onto the exposed wires and the area of the plug where you'll be making the joint. Using a screwdriver or long-nose pliers, press the wires over the solder joint and touch the wires with the soldering iron. As soon as the solder flows together, remove the iron and hold the wire in position as the joint cools.

Once its cool enough to handle, simply screw the body of the jack plug back on, test one more time for continuity and that cable should be good for a few more years.

WHY YOU NEED THIS
Your guitar cable has stopped working

WHAT YOU NEED
Soldering iron; solder; multimeter; long-nose pliers

1 Like a jack socket, this mono jack plug has two connections – positive and negative. This is the positive

2 Allow the jack plug to cool down after you've finished soldering, or you'll burn your fingers

9. CURING CHOKE OUT

WHY YOU NEED THIS
Notes cut out when you bend strings

WHAT YOU NEED
Large flathead screwdriver; allen key; small flathead screwdriver; radius gauge

You've probably experienced this: it's the climax of your solo, you hit that high note and start to bend up to finish with your carefully honed vibrato and then, suddenly, the note just fizzles out and dies on you. It's called 'choke out' and it's a drag.

Almost every guitar has a fingerboard with a radius, and the radius varies from guitar to guitar. For instance, vintage Fenders had a 7.25-inch radius, whereas modern ones tend to be 9.5 inches. Gibsons have traditionally had a 12-inch radius, while vintage Gretsches had several different radii – often on the same fingerboard.

Look at your bridge or bridge saddles and you should be able to see that the string heights are set to create a curve that more or less matches the fingerboard radius. The high E will be the lowest string on the curve and, as you bend it upwards, the section of string between the fretted note and the bridge will get ever closer to the top of the frets.

If the string height is set too low, the string will actually touch the higher frets when you bend it up, and that's what causes 'choke out'. Assuming the frets are level and neck relief is properly adjusted (see tip number one) the only solution is to raise the string height at the bridge.

Wrap over bridges usually have large bolts at each end, and you'll need a large flathead screwdriver to adjust the bridge height. Take care because the plating flakes off easily. Try wrapping some masking tape or insulation tape over the screwdriver to prevent metal-to-metal contact. If you find that a lot of force is needed to turn the bolts, slacken the strings to make the adjustment then tune back up to check your progress.

To adjust Strat and Tele saddles, you will need an allen key, although some Tele saddles require a mini screwdriver. Tune-o-matic bridges are usually set using thumb wheels and, again, you may need to slacken the strings before you can get them to move.

Whichever bridge you're dealing with, the idea is to set the high E string so that you can bend it at least a whole tone before it begins to choke out. With 7.25-inch radius fingerboards, you will usually be obliged to set the action relatively high. Even if you prefer a low action, the geometry of the guitar partly determines how low you can go.

1 If your top E and B strings are too low they will choke out when you bend the strings, and the easiest fix is to raise the string height. On Fender-style guitars, such as this Tele, you can adjust the string heights individually – and a radius gauge can help you to maintain an even curve

10. SETTING STRING RADIUS

This one really applies only to guitars with saddles that allow for individual string height adjustment. With wrapovers and tune-o-matics, you're stuck with what you have.

Assuming you have followed the guidelines in tip number nine for setting the saddle height of the high E string, do the same with the low E string. This time, you're looking for a saddle height that allows the low E to play cleanly all along the neck.

Next, you'll need a radius gauge – and you can find free ones online. Simply search for 'Pickguardian radius gauges', follow the link to the PDF, print it, then carefully cut out the gauges with sharp scissors.

As a rule of thumb, you should match the radius of the strings to the radius of the fingerboard. If you're uncertain what radius you're dealing with, simply slacken the strings, pull them off to the sides of the board and use your gauges to figure out the radius of the board.

String the guitar back up and tune it, then place the chosen radius gauge over the strings close to the bridge saddles. The idea is to sit the gauge on the two E strings then raise each of the other saddles one by one to just touch the underside of the gauge. To do this, you may need to drop the height of the A, D, G and B saddles before you start.

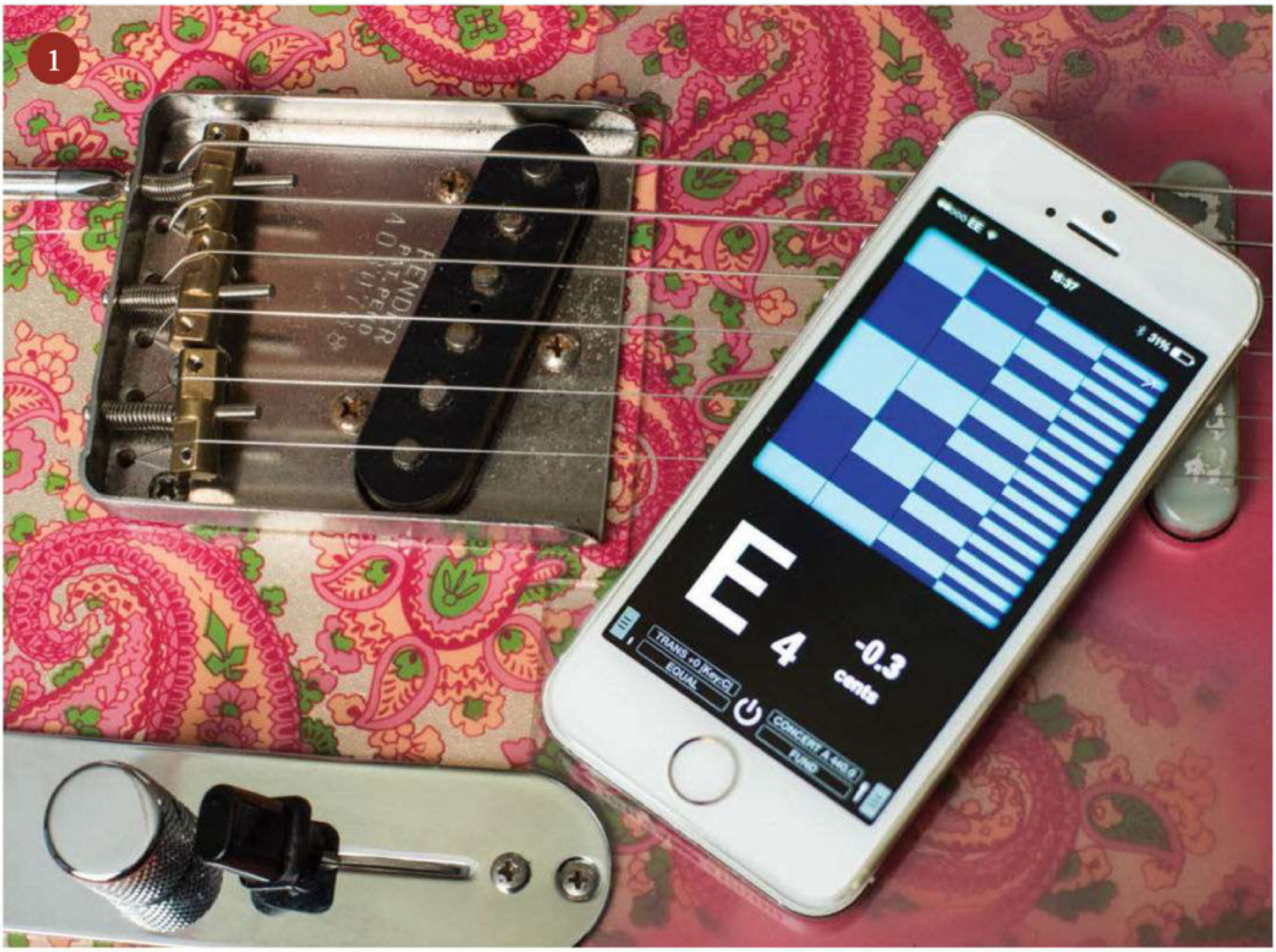
Many professionals use metal gauges that slip under the strings, but the top method is close enough for our purposes. In reality, you can set the strings to a radius that's slightly flatter than the board's. After all, the strings are at least 0.25 inches above the board at the bridge, so you could set the strings to a 7.5-inch radius to match a 7.25-inch board or 9.75 inches to match a 9.5-inch board.

The gauge will give you a very good starting point. From there, you can make small adjustments based on how the guitar feels to play. Ultimately, that's always the best way to dial in a great set-up.

WHY YOU NEED THIS
It's the difference between a guitar that feels OK and one that plays brilliantly

WHAT YOU NEED
Radius gauge; allen key or screwdriver

1 Rest the gauge on the two E strings and bring up each of the other strings to just touch the underside of the gauge



11. BASIC INTONATION ADJUSTMENT

WHY YOU NEED THIS
To make your guitar play in tune all over the neck

WHAT YOU NEED
High-quality tuner or tuner app on your phone

Have you ever noticed that notes and chords played down the cowboy end of the neck sound in tune, but things sound increasingly out of tune as you move higher up the neck? If so, your guitar's intonation probably needs adjustment.

Perfect pitch is a curse that afflicts very few of us, so for the most part we can achieve perfectly acceptable intonation by following a very simple procedure. Best of all, there are plenty of super-accurate 'strobe tuner' phone apps that allow you to achieve much better results than old-fashioned guitar tuners.

Before intonating your guitar, you should ensure that the neck relief and action is properly set – see tips one, nine and ten for details. If the guitar has a vibrato bridge, you also need to adjust the spring tension to taste. Once you're ready, carefully tune all the open strings to concert pitch – making several passes if necessary.

Starting with the top E, play the open string then fret the string at the 12th fret, play it again and check your tuner. If the fretted octave note is sharp, you need to increase the scale length, which means moving the saddle further away from the nut. If the octave note is flat, you need to decrease the scale length so that the saddle is moved towards the nut.

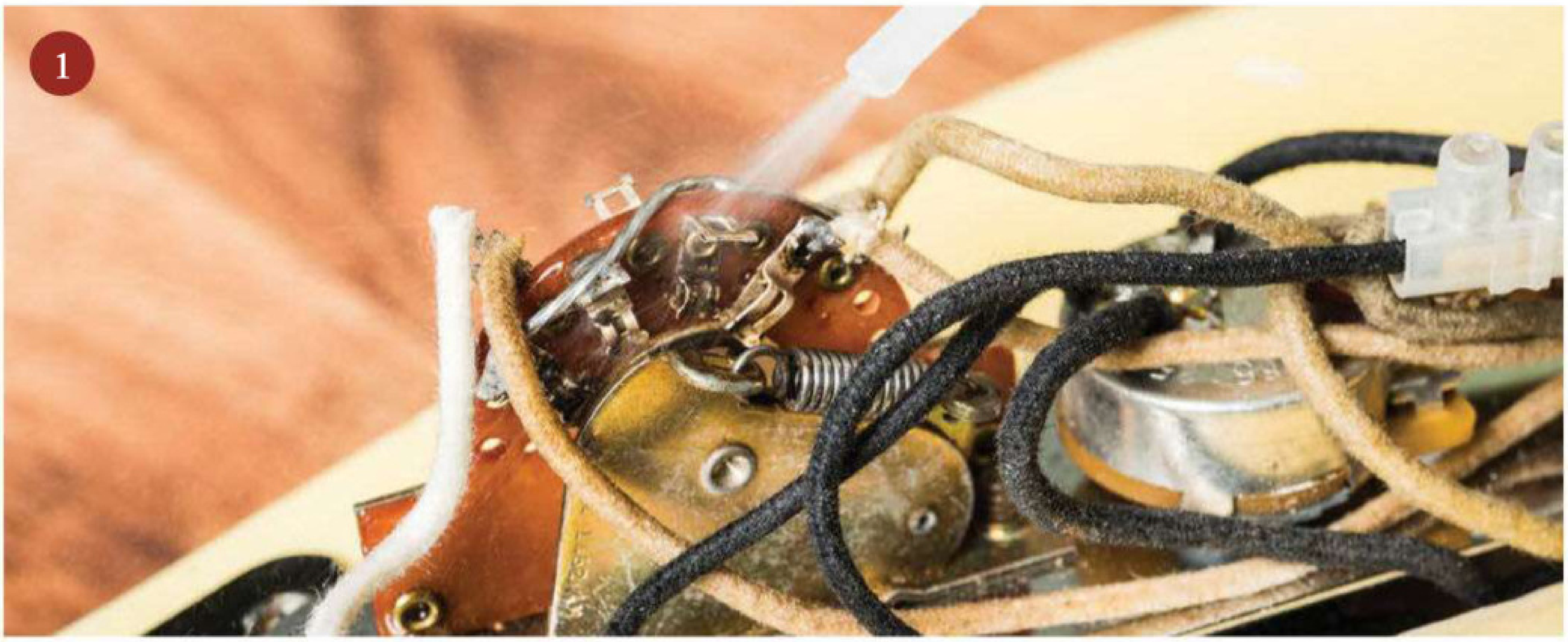
Unless the guitar is wildly out, the adjustment range is unlikely to exceed a few millimetres. Each time you adjust a saddle, remember to re-tune the open string before re-checking the intonation. If you are finding it hard to increase the scale length, try slackening the string before attempting to move the saddle.

If you're using a strobe tuner app, it should be set to 'cents'. You will notice that it's super-sensitive, and the pitch of the fretted note will vary depending on how hard it's being pressed. Just try to apply the sort of pressure that's typical of your playing style.

With the top E done, you can work your way across the other strings. Be aware that pickup magnetism can pull the wound strings flat as you move up the neck, so consider dropping their height when you are performing this procedure. This is a typical Fender trait.

Also, use a screwdriver with a shaft that's long enough to reach the saddle screws straight-on. If the handle forces you to come in at an angle, it's easy to slip off the screw head and damage the finish. Those of you distressing guitars should feel free to use the shortest and most inappropriate screwdrivers you can find.

1 Strobe tuner apps are cheap, convenient and accurate. This E string is 0.3 of a cent flat. That will never do



12. CLEANING OUTPUT JACKS, POTS AND SWITCHES

WHY YOU NEED THIS
Connections and controls are noisy or intermittent

WHAT YOU NEED
Contact cleaner spray; abrasive paper

There's a bit of a knack to cleaning switches and control potentiometers. Firstly, you must ensure that the contact cleaner gets to the spots where it's needed, so don't lose the extension tube that plugs into the aerosol nozzle.

If you're cleaning a pot, try to get the end of the tube firing into the open slot of the casing behind the solder tags. Sometimes, this just isn't possible when the potentiometer is soldered onto a circuit board. Try squirting into one of the perforations in the pot casing instead.

If the pot is inside a semi-acoustic, buy yourself a 'pot cleaning cap' to direct the cleaner through the knob shaft and down into the casing. Things are generally easier to get at with open-frame Fender-style switches.

Once the switch cleaner has been applied, work the pot or switch back and forth vigorously. Repeat the process and, while you're at it, do it again. The idea is to dislodge dirt or oxidisation and re-establish clean contact between the conductive surfaces.

Gibson-style toggle switches and jack sockets require a slightly different approach. Here, there are no moving parts, just contact points. Try spraying some contact cleaner onto some 800 or 1,000 grit abrasive and draw it across the contact points to expose clean metal. Remember, it's invariably cheaper and easier to repair a part than it is to replace it.

1 Aim the contact cleaner's extension tube at the switch contacts then, after spraying, work the switch back and forth rapidly several times

2 This old jack socket has oxide build-up on the tip connector

3 A quick rub with 1,000 grit paper exposes clean and shiny metal

13. CLEANING AND CONDITIONING FINGERBOARDS

WHY YOU NEED THIS
Fingerboards dry out; the dirt shortens string life; it's unhygienic and looks horrible

WHAT YOU NEED
Naphtha; fingerboard oil; kitchen paper

This applies only to guitars with bare wood fingerboards. Finish usually protects maple 'boards, but rosewood and ebony fingerboards soon gunge up with dirt, finger grease, dead skin, food residue, blood and the general detritus of any guitar player's life.

In this era of relics, many find the cruddy look appealing. However, if you prefer to live without the urge to wash your hands every time you play, a simple clean-up procedure will improve the feel of your guitar. You'll also find that the crud doesn't get into your string windings, so they'll last longer – and a clean fingerboard feels faster and slicker to play.

Lighter fluid is a liquid known as naphtha, and it's a very gentle and effective guitar cleaner. After removing your strings, squirt some naphtha onto a folded piece of kitchen paper and begin rubbing the board. You'll soon see the dirt coming off onto the paper, and every so often you should change to a fresh area of paper.

Work on one fret at a time and eventually you'll get all that dirt off. If the board appears dry and dull, try applying some fingerboard conditioner or lemon oil. Allow it to soak in for 10 minutes or so, wipe off any excess with a paper towel and buff up the board with a clean cotton cloth before re-stringing. This is something you might consider doing once or twice a year, depending on how much the guitar is being played.

1 This fingerboard isn't too bad, but you can see dirt beginning to build up

2 A naphtha-soaked piece of kitchen paper gently lifts the dirt off the fingerboard but leaves the wood looking a bit dry

3 Apply a dab of fingerboard conditioner or lemon oil to the board

4 Spread out the oil with your finger, working it up to the edges of the frets, and allow it to soak in

5 At the end of this procedure, the board looks clean and the wood grain pops with a deep colour

Storemags

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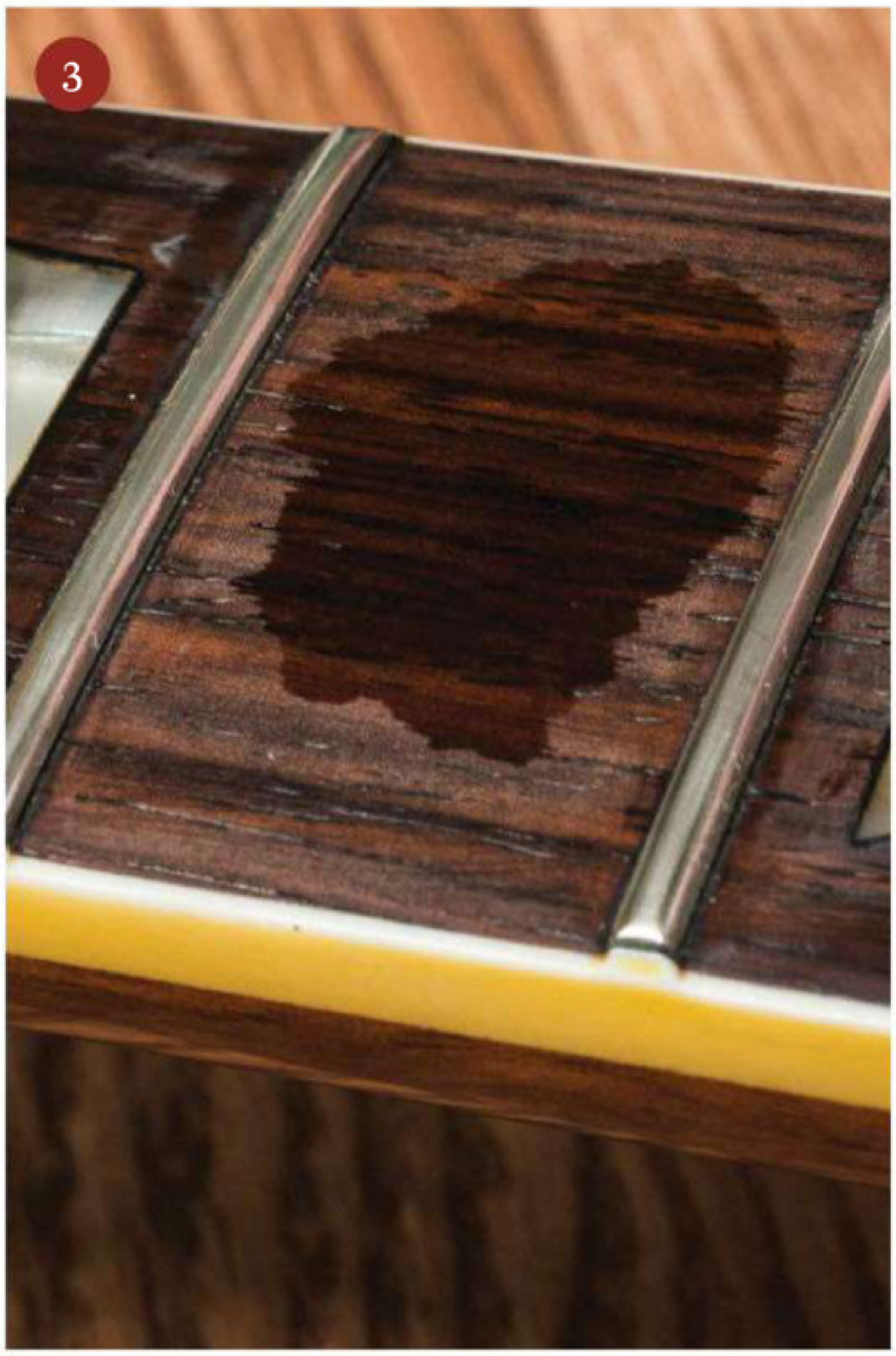
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65
ULTIMATE LEMON OIL
4 fluid oz (118 ml)

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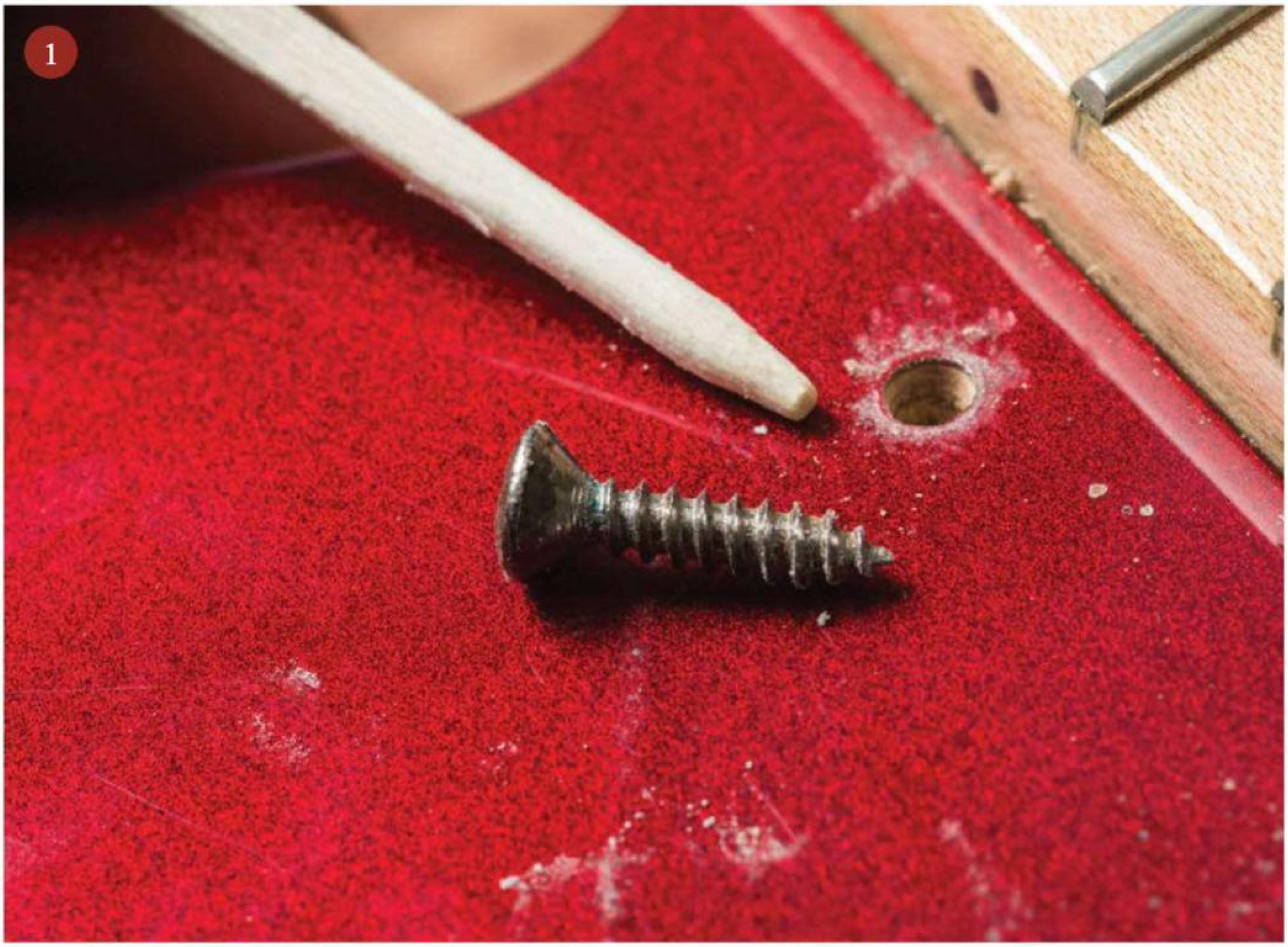

14. PLUGGING AND RE-DRILLING LOOSE SCREW HOLES

WHY YOU NEED THIS
Loose strap button, pickguard and tuner screws

WHAT YOU NEED
Sharp blade; sandpaper; matchstick or skewer stick

1. Use a sharp blade and sandpaper to whittle the end of a matchstick and shape it like the screw
2. Cover the end of the matchstick in Titebond Original and push it into the screw hole
3. Wipe off the excess glue and allow around 30 minutes' setting time
4. Carefully trim the stick flush with the surface
5. Using a drill bit with a diameter slightly smaller than the screw's, drill a pilot hole
6. You should find that the screw will now tighten up properly and hold its tightness

Over time, you may find that strap button and pickguard screws have a tendency to become loose. Changing to a bigger screw isn't an option, so you need to plug and re-tap the screw hole.

For small pickguard screws, you can use match sticks. One reader recently suggested barbecue skewers because the wood is slightly harder. Using a sharp blade and sandpaper, try whittling away the square corners of the matchstick to create a diameter and taper that matches the screw.

Cover the end of the screw with a strong wood glue such as Titebond Original and push it firmly into the empty screw hole. Wipe off any glue squeeze-out and allow 30 minutes or so for the glue to set.

Taking great care not to damage the finish, slice off the stick so it's flush with the body then drill a pilot hole that's slightly smaller than the diameter of the screw. You will then be able to tap the screw way into the plugged hole and you should end up with a tight and secure fit.

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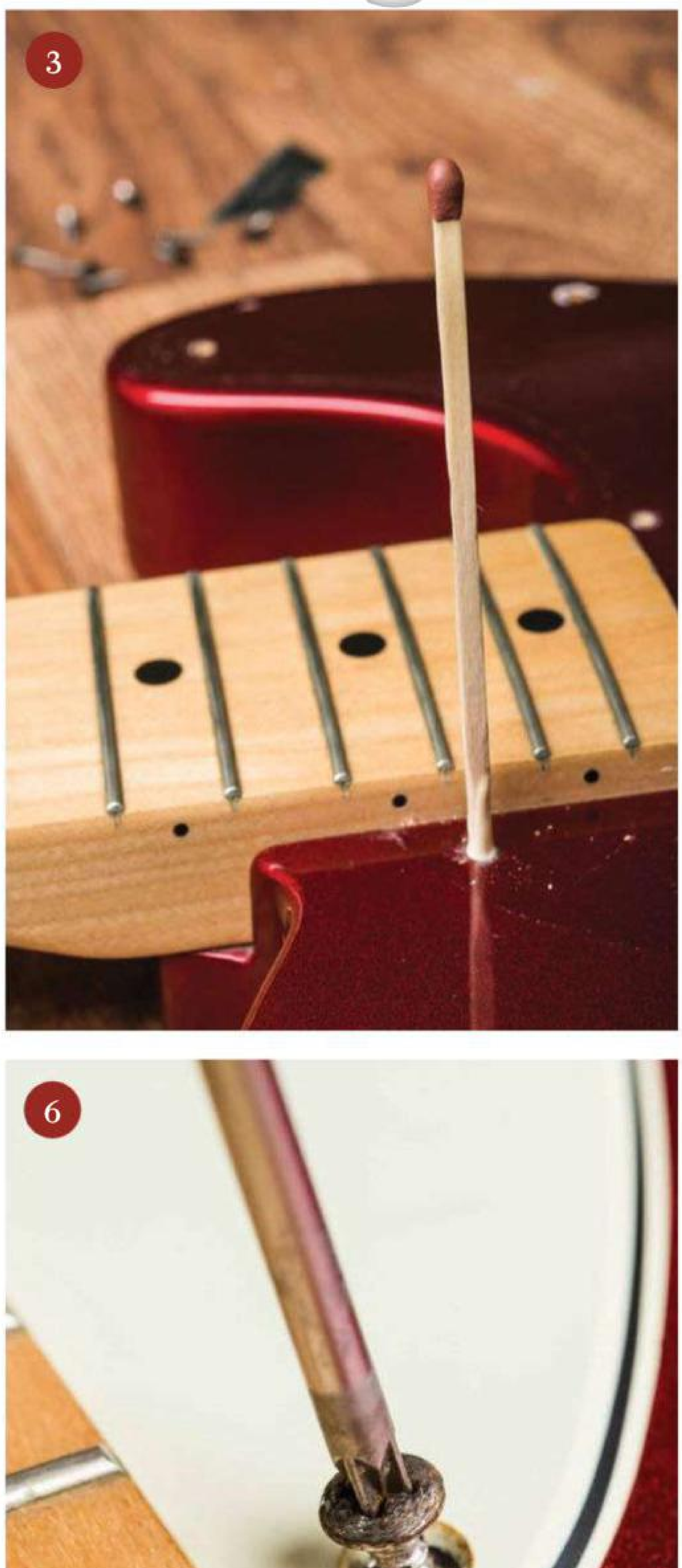
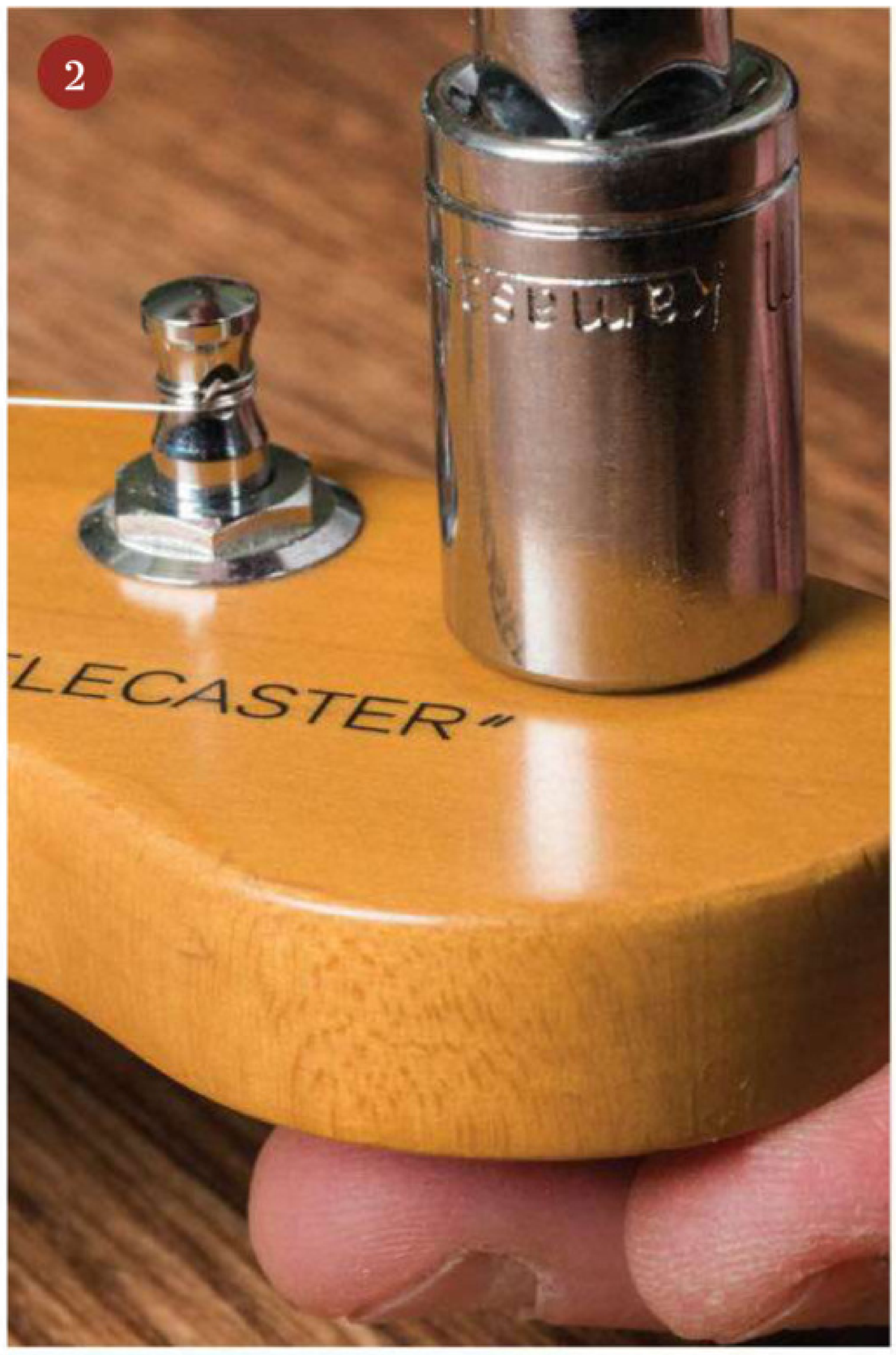




15. TIGHTENING DIE-CAST TUNERS

WHY YOU NEED THIS
Your die-cast tuners feel loose and sloppy

WHAT YOU NEED
Socket set; screwdriver

Over time, most die-cast tuners begin to feel a bit loose and sloppy. This vagary can make small tuning adjustments tricky to perform. Fortunately, however, there's an easy fix.

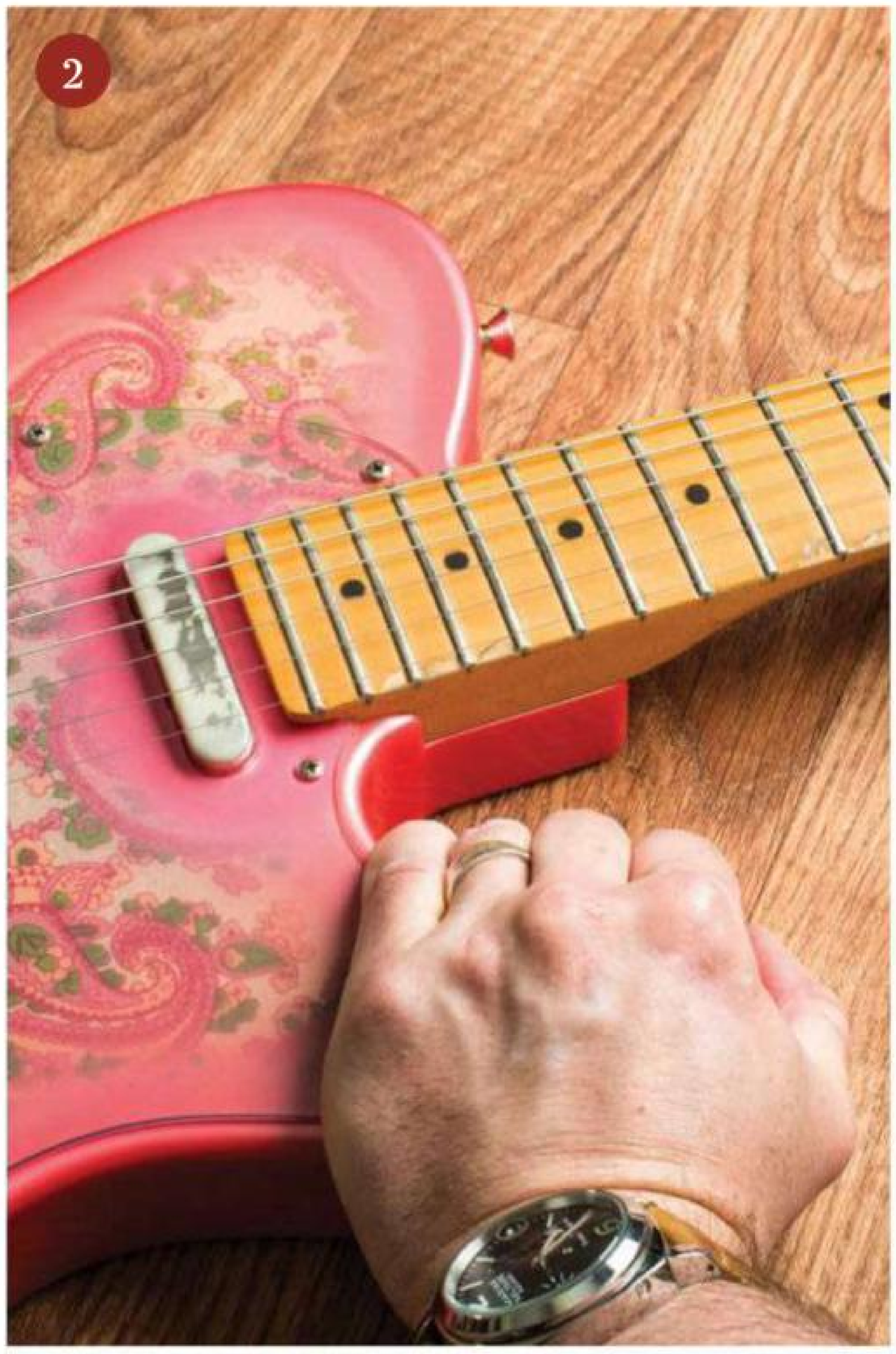
Most die-cast tuners have a nut-style bushing and washer, and the bushing is screwed down to clasp the tuner onto the headstock. With the strings removed, find the correct-sized socket from a socket set and tighten all the bushings. You can use pliers, but if you damage the tuner or slip off and scratch your headstock, don't say we didn't warn you.

Next, find a screwdriver that fits tightly into the screw that holds the tuner button onto the shaft. Hold the button with one hand to prevent it from turning and tighten the screw. Remember, it doesn't have to be tightened fully – just enough to eliminate the sloppy feel. Work your way along all the button screws and you're done.

1 The screw-down bushings sometimes work loose, which can result in vibration noise as well as wobbly tuner posts

2 The safest way to tighten the bushing is to use the correct -sized socket

3 Use a screwdriver to tighten the button screw. This will improve the feel of the tuner but if you over-tighten, the tuner will be too stiff to move



16. STRAIGHTENING A SKEWED BOLT-ON NECK

WHY YOU NEED THIS
E strings slipping off the fingerboard

WHAT YOU NEED
Large screwdriver

These days, guitar builders pride themselves on ultra-tight neck joints, but back in the day neck pockets tended to be a little more 'roomy'. That's why all those old Fenders sounded a bit pants... or maybe not.

Anyway, what can't be denied is that tight neck pockets make it harder for bolt-on necks to move about. Even with the neck screws fully tightened, it's all too easy for a neck to shift in its pocket, and that can bring the E strings perilously close to the edges of the board. In addition to making your guitar play out of tune, over-enthusiastic finger vibrato can prove disastrous.

Take a look at the end of your neck square-on. The distances between the edges of the fingerboard and the two E strings should be identical. If the gaps differ, your neck probably needs some chiropractic treatment.

Slacken off the strings, but make sure there's just enough tension to hold them taught. Unscrew each of the neck plate screws by a whole turn then grasp the body while you pull the neck straight with your other hand.

Check the neck visually once again, and you can tap the sides of the neck with the palm of your hand to make small adjustments. Once you're satisfied the neck is square to the body, re-tighten all four neck screws, tune up and you should be good to go.

storemags

1 The skewed neck is quite obvious on this Paisley Telecaster – the low E is too close to the edge of the fingerboard

2 After slackening the strings and the neck screws, grasp the body and the neck to pull the neck straight

3 Tighten-up the neck screws then re-tune the guitar. The gaps between the fingerboard edges and the E strings are now identical

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